

STATE LIBRARY OF PENNSYLVANIA  
docs.pa PY H673.2 H767  
Homespun textile tradition of



0 0001 00072560 4

STATE LIB.  
OF PA.



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2016 with funding from

This project is made possible by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services as administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education through the Office of Commonwealth Libraries

HY H 61 5.2  
H 767

STATE LIBRARY OF PENNSYLVANIA  
DOCUMENTS SECTION



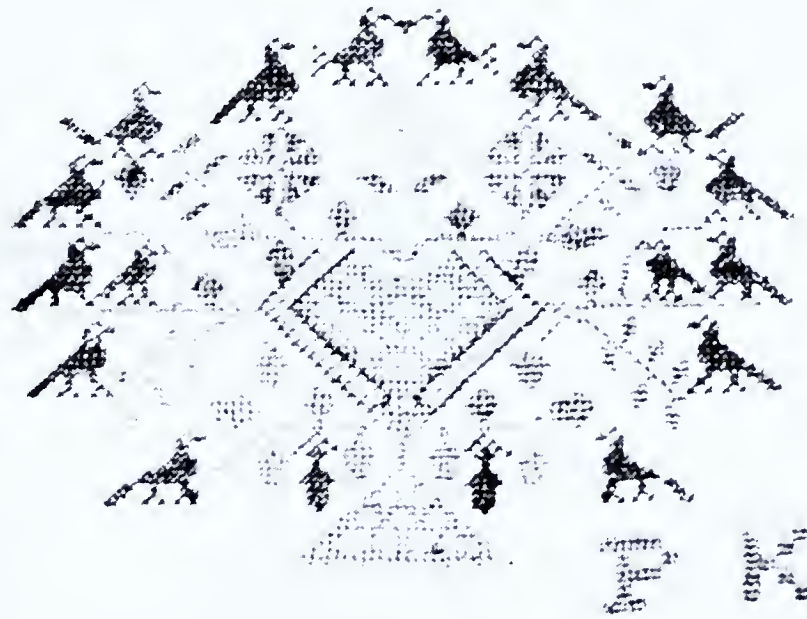
Py H6732  
H 767

The  
Homespun  
Textile  
Tradition  
of the  
Pennsylvania  
Germans





# The Homespun Textile Tradition of the Pennsylvania Germans



Introduction by    Ellen J. Gehret  
                             Alan G. Keyser

Pennsylvania Farm Museum of Landis Valley

The following, through sharing their time, knowledge, and treasured possessions, have made this exhibition possible:

Robert C. Bucher  
Mr. and Mrs. Philip Gehret  
Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Gunnion  
Sandra M. Highhouse  
Claudia Hopf  
Alan G. Keyser  
Isaac Clarence Kulp, Jr.  
Mary Ann Mellnay

Front Cover. DECORATED HAND TOWEL

18" x 61"; bleached linen worked in red and blue cotton.

This towel by Sara Yorty, if not the most highly decorated Pennsylvania towel, certainly ranks among the five most elaborate. Dated 1831.

Back Cover. This motif is from a needlework picture illustrated in Plate 35.



# Foreword

**A**MONG the seminars presented during the 1973 annual Institute of Pennsylvania Rural Life and Culture was one entitled "Early Textiles Found in Pennsylvania." The program was conducted jointly by Ellen J. Gehret and Alan G. Keyser, both Montgomery countians, and was developed from their previous research of the spinning, weaving and dyeing traditions inherent in the Pennsylvania German folk culture. During the past ten years both have diligently searched primary source material, which included private journals, tax records, wills, and estate inventories from central and southeastern Pennsylvania, where the larger portion of the Pennsylvania German population resided.

That Ellen and Alan had uncovered a wealth of information, heretofore undiscovered, soon became apparent. The need to proceed further by recording their findings in printed form was also seen at the time, and the concept for a comprehensive exhibition and catalogue was developed.

Three years later, and after considerable planning, we are pleased to present what we feel to be a significant exhibition and publication illustrating the varied types of textiles utilized within the agrarian society of the Pennsylvania Germans. And varied indeed were the uses for the homespun and handwoven fabrics these industrious people produced. Within the exhibit are objects ranging from market wallets and grain bags to a bed sheet possessing finely embroidered motifs and verse along its edge.

Neither the exhibit nor the catalogue should be construed as the final word for the subject which they portray. Both are intended as a continuation of the rediscovery and recording of one of the folk craft traditions as conceived by the Pennsylvania Germans.

CARROLL J. HOPF, *Director*  
Pennsylvania Farm Museum of Landis Valley



# Introduction

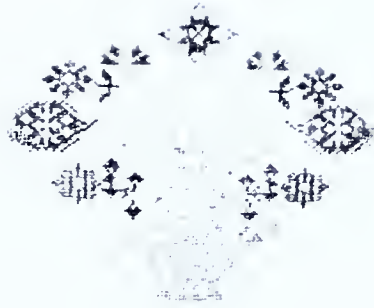
OVER the years interest in things that are Pennsylvania German has grown considerably. Tourism to the Pennsylvania German countryside and the high prices of Pennsylvania German folk art at auction are but two signs of growing interest. One of the areas of Pennsylvania German material culture which has been all but neglected in this upswing is the folk textile, which was produced by the folk for local use. This is not to say that these folk textiles were the only fabrics used by the culture, for from the earliest days imported goods from Europe were available at the port cities of Baltimore and Philadelphia. Storekeepers from the back country traveled to one or the other of these cities to stock their shelves and provide their customers with fabrics for the more expensive clothing and bedding. The examples of textiles shown in this catalogue can be classified as folk textile because they are homespun and either hand loomed, hand knitted or vegetable dyed. Here only the folk textiles used on the family farm are considered. Many textiles were used in following the various trades and do not appear here, nor do the ecclesiastical folk textiles, such as altar cloths.

The immigration of the Pennsylvania Germans to America began in 1683 and continued for nearly two centuries. They brought technologies and practices from Europe which were somewhat different from those of their Pennsylvania neighbors from the British Isles. This is not a comparative study, but some of their differences are apparent in the textiles they produced, especially the bedding items, in some of the weave types, and in some of the processing steps.



Of all the fibers needed and used by the Pennsylvania farmer and his family, the flax plant or linen yarn was of first importance. The flax plant played a dual role in that it supported the linseed oil mills as well as producing linen yarn for both household and agricultural uses. Flax cultivation and processing were long and involved and the entire farm family participated in them. It took not less than nine months for flax to go from seed to fiber. Additional time was then needed for spinning, dyeing and weaving the linen yarn into useful yardage. When completed the farmer had strong durable fabric that was able to meet the demands of everyday farm life.

Nearly every farm in Pennsylvania had a flax patch in one corner of the oats field. The size of the flax patch varied according to the number of people to be clothed and bedded from it, but about one-fourth acre of flax per person per year or about two acres per farm were generally required. Flaxseed was sown in rich moist soil in early April, and in June the flax plant bloomed with a blue flower and produced a seed vessel about the size of large buckshot. This housed the flaxseed used by oil millers for linseed oil. In early July the seed boll became ripe, and the farm women pulled the entire flax plant out of the ground. The



flax fiber is in the stem of the plant, so it was important to pull the entire plant and not waste any of the fiber by cutting it.

After drying, the seed boll was threshed with a flax flail to remove the seed. The remaining plant was dew retted or rotted in the meadow for three to five weeks to dissolve the mucilage between the linen fiber and woody portion of the stalk, enabling the fiber to be removed for spinning. The flax brake, scutching board and knife, and a coarse and fine hetchel were the tools used in sequence by the farm family to separate the short (tow) and long (linen) fibers from the woody boon. This work was completed in the fall of the year, and the tow and linen fibers were stored in the attic until the flax spinning began in early winter.

Second to flax in fiber importance was wool. Until about 1850, livestock on the Pennsylvania farm frequently included a flock of ten to fifteen sheep. From a financial standpoint sheep were worth only one-tenth the value of a cow; however, each spring the sheep gave the farmer a fresh supply of wool, at which time the sheep's full value was realized. Good wool production was important, so farmers and sheep breeders worked together to protect sheep from dogs and wolves and concerned themselves with selective breeding, proper feeding, and treatment of disease to improve the quantity and quality of the wool.

The annual wool season was short, lasting from May to July. It did not involve strenuous work as did the flax process; thus the oldest generation in the household helped with the wool processing. In early May the men washed the sheep in a nearby stream to remove most of the surface dirt and manure. Several days later, when the sheep were dry, the farmer and his hired help sheared the sheep in the meadow with hand-forged iron sheep shears. The women of the household then removed any remaining sticks, weeds or debris from the shorn wool before sorting the fleece to be carded. Each fleece weighed three to four pounds and,<sup>1</sup> according to early wills, provided one person with basic woolens for a year.

Before wool was successfully spun the woolen fibers needed to be aligned or straightened with the use of wool cards. Competent wool carding helped to insure a fine yarn, but carding involved long, tedious handwork. To ease the work of the housewife, water-powered carding mills and woolen mills were built along many of the streams throughout Pennsylvania.

Wool spinning began immediately after the carding was finished and continued into the summer months.

Like flax, the hemp plant was raised on many farmsteads throughout Pennsylvania during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although hempseed was sold to the oil mill, hemp was raised by Pennsylvania farmers primarily for its fiber, used in cloth and rope.

The cultivation and processing of the hemp plant resembled that of flax. It appears that careful retting and braking were all that was necessary to separate the hemp fiber from the rind of the stalk to ready the fiber for the ropemaker. Further refinement, probably with the use of the hemp hackle, was needed if the hemp fiber was to be handspun and woven into cloth. The use of hemp in cloth extended to at least 1849, when one weaver recorded weaving hemp cloth,<sup>2</sup> but the hemp culture was probably continued slightly longer to provide fibers for rope.



The flax, wool and hemp cultures were traditional and basic to the Pennsylvania German farmer. During the eighteenth century raw cotton became available at the market in Philadelphia, having arrived in Pennsylvania from the southern states. It met a hearty reception with the Pennsylvania farmer and soon became an adopted part of his folk culture. Despite its expense, many farmers took the raw cotton home where it was carded and spun by their wives. Homespun cotton was used with much pride and is today one of the rarest of homespun fabrics. Imported cotton fabrics such as chintz and calico were available and used by the affluent of the day. The invention of the cotton gin in 1793 had a major impact on the Pennsylvania farmer and contributed much to the decline of flax culture. Cotton gradually went from last to first in importance of domestic fabrics. The homespun cotton culture came to a close sometime before 1850.

The three basic steps of spinning taught early in life to every girl were: 1. the drawing out of the fiber; 2. the twisting of the fiber into a yarn; and 3. the winding on of the spun yarn. The classic spinning wheel was foot-powered, which left both hands free to draw down the flax fiber from the distaff and feed it into the flyer, where it was twisted or spun and wound onto a spool. There was a definite ratio between the speed of the foot treadling and the hand-feeding of the fiber into the flyer to get the proper amount of twist into the yarn. Learning this took coordination and practice.

The term "spinning wheel," according to Pennsylvania wills, inventories and sale records, denotes the efficient foot-powered wheel used to spin or ply tow or flax fibers into linen yarn. The slower hand-powered big wheel, long wheel or wool wheel was, as one of its names suggests, used to spin wool. Most Pennsylvania farms had at least one spinning wheel in good running order as well as one wool wheel. These wheels were considered women's tools, and the wife often brought the spinning wheel to the farm as part of her dowry.

To use the wool wheel, the spinner stood and turned the big wheel with the right hand. At the same time the left hand drew out the carded wool carefully and evenly to give the yarn a uniform twist at the tip of the revolving iron spindle. When a length of yarn was spun, the wheel was turned in the opposite direction to wind the yarn onto the inside portion of the spindle. Then the spinner began spinning the next length of yarn.

Strict attention was given to the amount of twist put into yarn. The single-ply yarns to be used for warp required a hard twist, while the yarns to be used for the weft were usually spun more loosely. The staple length of the fiber and the presence of foreign material, such as straw in coarse tow, were also a consideration in its eventual use as well as in spinning it. Spinning and plying knitting yarns required special care, as did the making of sewing thread, by plying two fine single strands into a stronger thread.

Estate inventories indicate that the "cotton wheel" was used on many Pennsylvania German farms throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to spin the imported raw cotton from the South. This wheel was probably similar to the wool wheel in that it was hand turned and had a long iron spindle, which gave the spinner more control when spinning the short-stapled cotton.

Occasionally men or women were hired by the day or week to help the farmer's wife during the spinning season. Wages paid to hired spinners for spinning wool were the same as wages paid for spinning flax. At times hired spinners would spin by the "cut" rather than by the day.

The "cut" was the basic unit of yarn measure used by the housewife and the weaver. The spun yarn was wound by hand from the wheel onto the cut reel. The circumference of the Pennsylvania German reel measured between seventy-two and one-half and seventy-six inches. The reel sounded a click every 150 revolutions which gave a "cut" about three hundred yards. A short thread was wrapped around each "cut" until the reel contained a full skein of six "cuts" of yarn. Through this system of measurement, the farm wife and weaver were able to determine what grade and how many yards of fabric could be woven from the amount of yarn she had spun. This system of measurement needed to be accurate, consistent and used by all the housewives and weavers in a given area as well as by the cabinetmakers who made the reels. The reel, cut reel, check reel or jack reel measured spun thread and yarn of tow, linen, wool, cotton or hemp, and was a companion piece to the spinning wheel. Reels and spinning wheels were precision made by local furniture makers or spinning wheel wrights and were often bought as a pair.

If linen yarn was to be woven into multicolor combinations of stripe, check or plaid, it was first bleached by bucking. This was a process in which the skeins of yarn were placed in a large bucking tub and covered with a heavy-tow bucking cloth. Wood ash was placed on the bucking cloth and boiling water was then poured on the ash and allowed to soak through the bucking cloth and completely cover the yarn. When the solution in the tub cooled, it was drawn off through a hole in the bottom of the tub, reheated and poured over fresh ash. The process was repeated until the yarn was bleached. One batch of yarn usually took a day to bleach. The yarn was then dried and softened by mild beating. Woven goods were also bleached; however, this was done by spreading the long bolts of linen on the grass in the meadow and watering them periodically until the sun had bleached them.



During the homespun period the great majority of the dyeing among the Pennsylvania Germans was done by professionals and not by housewives. Linen and cotton were dyed indigo blue by the blue dyer, and the woolens were dyed by either the fuller or the dyer (*Schönfarber*).

Some interest in home dyeing did exist, and between 1750 and 1866 at least twenty-seven German-language publications containing home dye recipes appeared in Pennsylvania. In these recipes about ninety-eight per cent of the dyestuffs called for were of the imported type, such as logwood, Bengal indigo, madder and fustic. The percentage of native dyestuffs in the manuscript recipes during the same period was only slightly higher than in the printed materials. The primary source for the imported dyes in the rural areas was the local store, and after examining numerous old store ledgers of the vegetable-dyestuff period, it is safe to assume, from the meager quantities of dyestuffs sold, that very little domestic dyeing was done in the Pennsylvania German area.



As with the other operations in the homespun culture, dyeing had a season. Blue dyers performed their services only in the warm months from April to October, when there was no danger of freezing either the wet yarn or the blue vat. The *Schönfarber* on the other hand dyed year round.

The blue dyer dyed not only yarn to be woven into checks, plaids and stripes, he also did piece dyeing. He dyed stockings and other items of clothing indigo blue, but some of the most spectacular piece dyeing was done up to the close of the eighteenth century in the form of resist dyeing. Here the bleached linen fabric was first printed with a mixture of white clay, tallow and gum arabic using hand-carved wood blocks with floral, geometric or bird designs. The fabric was then put into the indigo vat, and the areas which were printed took no color while the unprinted areas dyed blue. The fabric was washed after the dye had oxidized leaving white designs on a blue ground.

To date no primary source has come to light in the German areas of Pennsylvania which would prove that anyone other than professional weavers produced homespun fabric. With the exception of tape production, non-professional weaving was just not part of Pennsylvania German culture. These professionals were custom weavers, and the customer generally provided all the yarn, except for some of the cotton yarn used in coverlets during the last decades of the homespun period. As with other tradesmen, some weavers were better than others, and after examining a number of farmers' account books, it is apparent that some farmers considered certain weavers capable of producing only tow and common linen, but thought of others as master weavers worthy of making fine linen tablecloths and woolen coverlets. After the introduction of cheaper cotton store goods, the competition among weavers mounted, and during the depression just prior to 1820 many weavers gave up weaving and turned to farming or some more lucrative trade. Some of the better weavers continued their trade to the end of the homespun era and made the transition to weaving rag carpet.

The ability of the weaver was not the prime determinant in the production of fine linen cloth, but the ability of those who prepared and spun the linen was a major factor. It was a case of not being able to make a "silk purse from a sow's ear." The weaver had his set of rules and knew the number of "cuts" of yarn per pound required to thread each reed size on his loom, and if he did not receive yarn spun fine enough that it contained the proper number of "cuts" for a 1050 reed, he could not weave fine linen.

The old-time weavers referred to the fineness of the fabric they produced in terms of the number of dents or openings in the forty-five-inch reed used to produce a particular piece of fabric. For example, tow was woven through the reeds with from 350 to 800 dents and would have had from fifteen to thirty-five threads per inch in the warp direction. "Fine tow" was woven through the 850 reed and had thirty-six to thirty-eight threads per inch. All flaxen cloth woven through a 900 reed or finer was called linen.

A period of apprenticeship was necessary for young men "to learn the art and mystery of the weaving trade."<sup>3</sup> This period varied in length from the seventeen years one four-year-old



orphan boy was given to the more usual one and a half to two and a half years served by older teenaged apprentices. The agreements often allowed the apprentice time off to help in harvest and to attend his own catechetical instruction. The weaver provided free room and board as well as the service of laundering and mending his apprentice's clothes.

In rural areas weavers generally owned small farms. Being weavers primarily, they engaged in only enough farming to feed their families. However, weavers were no different from other tradesmen in that they worked as day laborers in the harvest fields. Old account books kept by weavers generally show only limited yardage to have been woven in the harvest month of July, and some of these same account books show for whom the weaver worked in the harvest. In the slow seasons of fall and winter, some weavers became custom butchers and traveled from farm to farm slaughtering beef cattle and hogs.

Depending on their level of affluence, the weavers wove in either a weaver shop or a room in the house. If it was in a room in the house, this room was generally on the second floor and capable of being heated either naturally by sunlight or by a fireplace or stove. In one weaver's room a tin heating drum on the stovepipe from the cookstove in the kitchen below was used for heat. If the weaver shop was in a separate building, a stove or fireplace was used for heat.

Three types of looms were probably used by the Pennsylvania German weavers. The most commonly used was the counterbalanced loom with either two or four harnesses. The next most common was probably the countermarch loom used to weave the more complicated patterns requiring eight, ten, twelve, sixteen, twenty, twenty-four or forty harnesses. The Jacquard loom, invented in France by Joseph-Marie Jacquard, was perfected by the year 1806.<sup>4</sup> However, it was not in use in the Pennsylvania German countryside until the late 1820's. It was on the Jacquard loom that all the elaborate floral coverlets with names, dates and places of manufacture were woven.

Manuscript weaving account books from southeastern Pennsylvania show that the linen and tow weaving began in about the first week in January and continued into the end of May. It also appears that the tow season began somewhat after the linen season. This may indicate that the linen was spun first, followed by the tow. Wool, linsey-woolsey and fabrics containing cotton were generally woven in the fall and winter—their season of use rather than the season in which they were spun. The majority of coverlets, on the other hand, seem to have been woven from February to July, but more study is needed on this point of textile research.

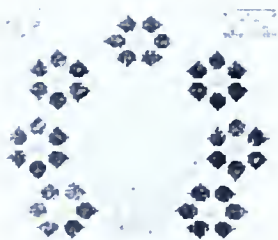
A good idea of the weaves produced by the German element in early Pennsylvania can be obtained by examining the old weaving pattern books. These manuscript and printed books contained the weavers' notes on the various patterns which they were capable of weaving on their looms. The earliest known example of a manuscript Pennsylvania German weaver's pattern book is the combination account book and pattern book begun in the 1760's by Henry Wismer, a Mennonite weaver of Bucks County. This book, still owned by a descendant of Henry Wismer, contains patterns for four-harness overshot as well as six- and eight-harness point twills. Other weavers' patterns from the eighteenth century show double-cloth and double-faced twill requiring up to twenty-four harnesses to weave, as well as four-harness M's and O's. Homespun coverlets, tablecloths, bed linens and towels have come to light which are not only identical in weave but are similar in pattern.



Since the old pattern books are written primarily in "Pennsylvania High German," they contain a number of German fabric terms. A few examples of these terms are *gebilds*, *cabild*, or *damast*—damask; *einflag* or *einfach*—double-faced twill; *dobbelt*—double cloth; *hin-und-wieder*, *pendwork* or *peindwork*—point twill; *dyöpper*—diaper; *gensaugig* or *fogelaugen*—goose eye or diamond twill; *flauer hockel beck* or *Flauer die Hockel Beck*—spot bronson; and *Zwillieh*—twill.



Much of the wool and linsey-woolsey homespun fabric was fullled after weaving. This process, an important step in finishing blankets and flannel, compacted the wool fibers and produced a tighter, more even, heavier piece of goods. The fulling was generally done at a fulling mill. Many of these mills are listed in the township tax records during the homespun period, and it would have been a simple matter for most householders to have taken fabric to the mill for fulling. In newspaper advertisements some fullers offered a pickup and delivery service at local taverns for those who could not travel to the mill.

The season for fulling was directly tied to the season for weaving wool and linsey-woolsey. The wool-weaving season started in late September and ran to February, while the fulling season began in mid-November and ended in mid-April. The end of the local fulling mills came in the 1880's, just after the last oil mills, and the weaving of homespun fabric ceased.



A large percentage of the homespun textiles was used by the farmer and his family in the farmhouse. At each meal the table was covered with a linen tablecloth, that could have been as simple as plain-weave tow or as elaborate as a twenty-harness damask. The cloths were usually white, but some were used in the natural flax color—plaids and checks were seldom used. Very often the warp ends were fringed, and some women embroidered their initials and the date, or small motifs along the edge, as a means of identification. Tablecloths varied from a single loom width to a double width depending on the size of the table. When not in use, tablecloths were kept in the kitchen dresser, the clothes press or the chest. Of all the homespun handwoven textiles, the tablecloth is the ultimate in hand-spinning and professional weaving. It showed the best that could be made by the teamwork of farm family and weaver. Not so spectacular were the tow hand towels, crocheted-tow dish cloths, and pot holders often made from partially worn-out pieces of linen. Plain linen cloths were used to line bread baskets, to sieve cottage cheese, to cover ball cheese in the cellar as it seasoned, and to protect butter and cheese as it was taken to market.

During the eighteenth century few textiles were obvious in the *Stubb*, stove room or living room of the Pennsylvania German farmhouse. Window curtains, floor coverings and upholstered furniture were a rarity in the Pennsylvania German household during this period. However, the *Schanck* or clothes press in the *Stubb* contained coats, great coats, mantles and



suits on the pegs and smaller items of clothing or other textiles on the shelves and in the drawers.

Rag carpet, a nineteenth-century development, became popular with the Pennsylvania farmer, and the living room was the first room in the house to receive a floor covering. As the demand for rag carpet increased, weavers generally used a commercially spun cotton warp and rags supplied by the housewife for the weft. However, spinning records exist from the 1840's which record the spinning of "cuts" of carpet yarn by a woman spinster.<sup>5</sup> This entry puts some rag-carpet production into the homespun category.

Needlework pictures became somewhat popular during the mid-nineteenth century, and the housewife embroidered, framed and hung her picture in the living room where it could be seen and enjoyed. These needle-made pictures were large or small, usually square shaped, and well planned with a balanced design, and their function was purely decorative.



Often confused with needle-made pictures is the sampler, which in the early period was rectangular in shape and became progressively squarer. The sampler was a utilitarian piece of needlework and was the means by which the young country women recorded with needle and thread large and small letters, numerals and various motifs. Little attention was given to the placement of designs other than close together to allow room for the next one. The sampler was not intended for "show," by being framed and hung on the wall, and was therefore put away in the chest until needed. Using the sampler as a guide, the name or initials, the year or numbers of rotation were often embroidered on many pieces of household textiles and clothing.

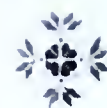
Travelers to the German settlements of Pennsylvania record their amazement at the way the local people dressed their beds and slept in them. After seeing and sleeping in a "real German bed" for the first time, a New England tourist to Lancaster County in 1777 remarked, "I was placed between two beds without sheets or pillows. This, as I was told, was a prevailing custom, but which, as far as my experience goes, tends little to promote either sleep or comfort of a stranger."<sup>6</sup> It was not the bedstead that was unusual, but the bed, for the Pennsylvania German farmer used either a low-posted bedstead or a high-posted bedstead with bed curtains, as did most other Americans.

An excellent description of the typical Pennsylvania German bedstead and its furnishings is given in John Custer's estate inventory<sup>7</sup> of 1794 in Skippack and Perkiomen townships, Montgomery County. It lists "a short posted bedstead, chaff bed, 1 sheet, upper bed and case, 2 pillows, cases and bolster in upper room N. corner 4 pounds, 10 shillings." A tow chaff bag filled with cut pieces of straw was laid on the ropes and covered with a tow or linen sheet. The farmer lay on top of this sheet and under the feather bed, which was filled with about nineteen pounds of goose feathers. (Sleeping under this feather bed was a problem for most non-Germans.) At the head of the bed on the chaff bag lay the straw-filled bolster, and in more affluent households a feather bolster, and on top of this were a pair of feather pillows. The farmer and his wife slept in an almost sitting position.

The bed cases, pillow cases and bolster cases were woven in plaids and checks using color combinations of blue and white, brown and white, blue and brown, or blue, brown and white together. Blue and white resist-dyed yardage was also used for bedding as well as for the bed curtains. With a coverlet on top, the bed and bedstead were quite colorful.

Blankets were seldom used in the Pennsylvania German culture during the eighteenth century. Occasionally, however, nineteenth-century estate inventories indicate one or two blankets per household—not necessarily one blanket per bed. Blankets were usually all wool, but sometimes half wool, cotton or linsey-woolsey. They were woven by the weaver on request from the housewife or purchased at the local store.





The coverlet among the Pennsylvania Dutch appears to be a late eighteenth-century arrival. The inland estate inventories and dowry lists generally do not list coverlets much before the last quarter of the eighteenth century. However, few inventories fail to mention the colorful plaid or checked bed cases and pillow cases of the traditional bed. These cases were apparently the upper-most covers and, therefore, the decorative bed covers.

The plain-weave woolen coverlet with the design created by color only was probably the most common early coverlet. But the double-cloth, double-faced twill, and point twill coverlets were certainly made and used in the eighteenth century as well as in the nineteenth century. If the early weavers' pattern books are any indication of the coverlet types woven, it would appear that few four-harness overshot coverlets and no "summer and winter" coverlets were produced here. This would appear to be the case, for in an age when antique dealers carry artifacts to the four corners of the earth, very few "summer and winter" coverlets are found at flea markets and in antique shops of the "Dutch" country.

The chest was frequently kept in the bedroom and provided clean storage space that could be secured under lock and key. It was the obvious and convenient place to store bulky bedding and out-of-season clothing. Following are the contents of a chest inventoried in 1778 in Upper Saucon Township, Bucks County, Pennsylvania:<sup>8</sup> "a bundle of cotton, five shirts, four checked handkerchiefs, a remnant of cloth, a parcel of thread, a buckskin, blue and brown thread, a sheet, two bedcases, two bolsters, four pillows, remnants of cotton and linen stuff, and three yards of linen." Also kept in the chest was the sampler.

The sampler was important in the making of the decorated hand towel. From the collection of motifs and borders on her sampler, the farm wife was able to plan the cross-stitch decoration she wanted on her towel. The decorated hand towel was long and narrow with tabs in the upper corners for hanging and was usually laid out in symmetrical panels of motifs that sometimes included inscriptions. Red and blue cotton thread and multicolor embroidery silks were generally used for the cross-stitch embroidery, but colored wools became popular during the Victorian era. Frequently drawn thread work was included in the finished towel as was faggotting, needlelace, macrame and other forms of needlework. Having come from a Continental European tradition, decorated hand towels reached a peak in popularity in Pennsylvania during the 1830's and 1840's. They were purely decorative in nature and graced the bedroom door.

Bedrooms in early rural Pennsylvania were usually equipped with a pegboard, which was a convenient place to keep the everyday trousers, waistcoat, shortgown and petticoat. The typical Pennsylvania German farmer in the early period wore trousers or knee breeches, a shirt and kerchief, waistcoat, coat, hat, shoes and stockings. His wife wore a shortgown and petticoat, with kerchief, apron, cap, shoes and stockings. All of the everyday clothing was made of tow, linen, linsey-woolsey or wool, and was of domestic manufacture.

Wardrobes were usually small in the early period, so clothing storage was not a problem. By the nineteenth century, farms prospered, wardrobes grew, and the bureau became a popular piece of bedroom furniture. White homespun-linen bureau scarves, woven in a plain or pattern weave, soon became fashionable, as were their close relatives the pattern-weave towel and the tablecloth.

Many homespun items were used in the pursuit of agriculture in the early period, and since durability was one of the primary prerequisites, most farm textiles were either of heavy tow





or hemp. Hemp was used in making rope, and many of the larger early nineteenth-century farms had rope spinning equipment and a ropewalk. Hemp was also woven in combination with tow in grain bags.

Of the various bags used on the farm, both in the house and in the barn, the grain bag is the most frequently found today. These bags, which were used to transport grain to the mill for custom grinding or sale, had the owner's name either stamped, stenciled, sewn or painted on them. However, the grain bags which were used only on the farm had no need for identification and were therefore plain tow bags. Most homespun bags, no matter what their intended use, had two small eyelets near the top. Through these two holes was fastened the original tie. This way the tie, which was not of the throw-away type, was always kept with the bag. At times grain and meal bags were as small as one bushel and as large as three bushels, but the most usual size was two bushels. The smallest bags on the farm were those in which the housewife kept the garden seeds of her own production.

The *zwerg sack* or market wallet, with both ends sewn shut and having a slit in the middle of one side, came in several sizes and was used to carry store goods home and to take produce to market. The large-size wallet was thrown over the horse behind the saddle, as were saddle bags, and was used to carry small items to market on horseback.

Another type of homespun textile was the net. This was not woven but "knitted." The largest nets found on the farm were the pigeon nets that were used in trapping the wild passenger pigeon, which was once numerous in Pennsylvania. These nets were sometimes thirty feet long. Another large net on the farm was the seine, which was stretched across the stream to catch fish as they moved upstream. Both the pigeon net and the seine were at times owned in partnership by two or more farmers. Smaller fishnets, made of tightly plied homespun tow yarn, were the hooped *stell garn* or set net, the hammer net, minnow net, the dip net and the gill net.

According to the old estate inventories in Pennsylvania, about one farm in five had a large homespun tow wagon cover for the heavy farm wagon. Although thousands of these covers once existed, probably fewer than two dozen have survived the shears and the ravages of time. Other estate inventories list cart covers for the two-wheeled carts. As far as we know, no homespun cart covers have survived.

In the period just prior to the close of the folk textile era, a decline in the culture is apparent. The blue dyer had all but ceased dyeing yarn and had long since stopped printing and dyeing indigo resist fabric. The women who were still spinning no longer spun the fine yarns of the earlier period, and as a result the later fabrics, which are generally in good condition today, are of a coarser weave. The weavers began using machine-spun cotton yarn as the weft in most linen fabrics. These fabrics ranged from tow for bed sheets to the three-color linens for bedding to the twill-weave fabric for tablecloths. The traditional hand weavers died one by one until only a few Mennonite and Amish carpet weavers survive in Pennsylvania. But the era of the true folk textile had ended by the 1870's.



## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup>David Shultze, *The Journals and Papers of David Shultze, 1726-1797* (Pennsburg, Pa., 1952), I, 177.
- <sup>2</sup>Manuscript account book of Abraham Serf at the Historical Society of York County, York, Pa. April 12, 1849.
- <sup>3</sup>John Wentz Justice of the Peace Docket, at the Historical Society of Montgomery County, Norristown, Pa.
- <sup>4</sup>Harold B. Burnham and Dorothy K. Burnham, *Keep Me Warm One Night: Early Handweaving in Eastern Canada* (Toronto, 1973), p. 317.
- <sup>5</sup>Magdalena Overholt manuscript spinning account book, 1841-1847 [p. 5], private collection.
- <sup>6</sup>Benjamin Rush, M.D., *An Account of the Manners of the German Inhabitants of Pennsylvania Written in 1789* (Philadelphia, 1875), p. 22.
- <sup>7</sup>John Custer estate papers, Register of Wills number 966, Montgomery County Courthouse, Norristown, Pa.
- <sup>8</sup>*Pennsylvania Archives*, Sixth Series, XII, 351. John Geisinger confiscated estate inventory, June 23, 1778.

# The Catalogue





### Plate 1. WEAVER'S ROOM

No community was complete without a weaver's shop or room such as the one shown here. The heavy Germanic-type loom was the most essential piece of equipment. However, the other weavers' tools were also necessary to produce a quality piece of fabric.



### Plate 2. FABRIC BOLT; Anonymous Loan

274" x 41½"; unbleached tow

This fabric was woven as fine tow, probably for bed sheets, but was never used. At one end are the knots used to tie one warp to the next on the loom. The conventional weaver's knot was not used here, but a simple one-inch twist of the two yarns against each other.



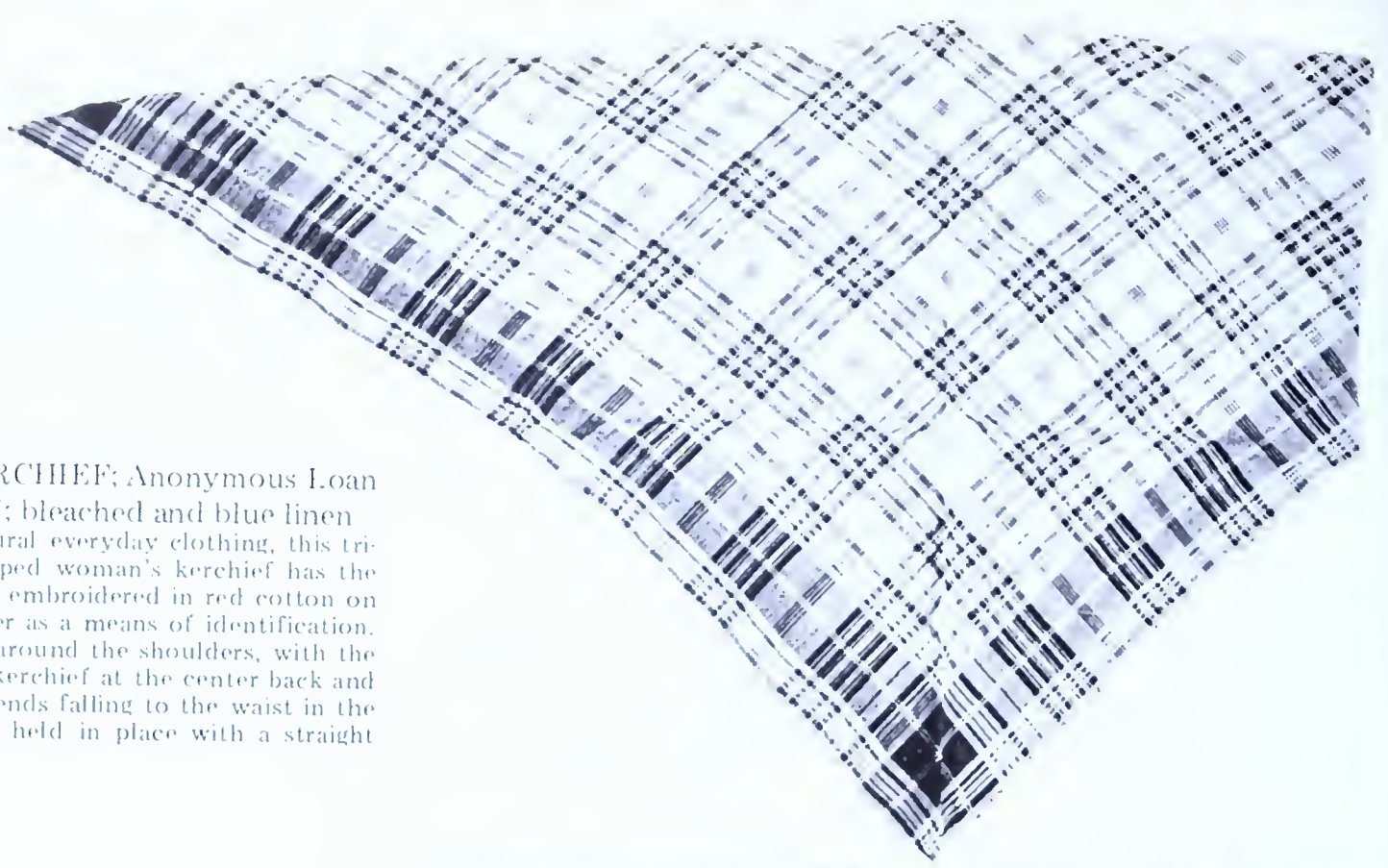


Plate 3. KERCHIEF; Anonymous Loan  
17" x 30 1/4"; bleached and blue linen

A piece of rural everyday clothing, this triangularly shaped woman's kerchief has the initials "CM" embroidered in red cotton on the left corner as a means of identification. It was worn around the shoulders, with the point of the kerchief at the center back and the two free ends falling to the waist in the front. It was held in place with a straight pin.

Plate 4. PETTICOAT; Anonymous Loan  
74" x 31 1/4"; blue cotton, red, white and blue wool

Linsey-woolsey was a popular fabric used for winter clothing by both men and women during the homespun era. The linen or cotton in the warp provided strength, whereas the wool used in the weft gave warmth as well as color to the fabric. Such is the case with this petticoat fragment, where a blue cotton warp was used with alternating stripes of red, white and blue wool in the weft. In this instance the woman wore the stripes horizontally.

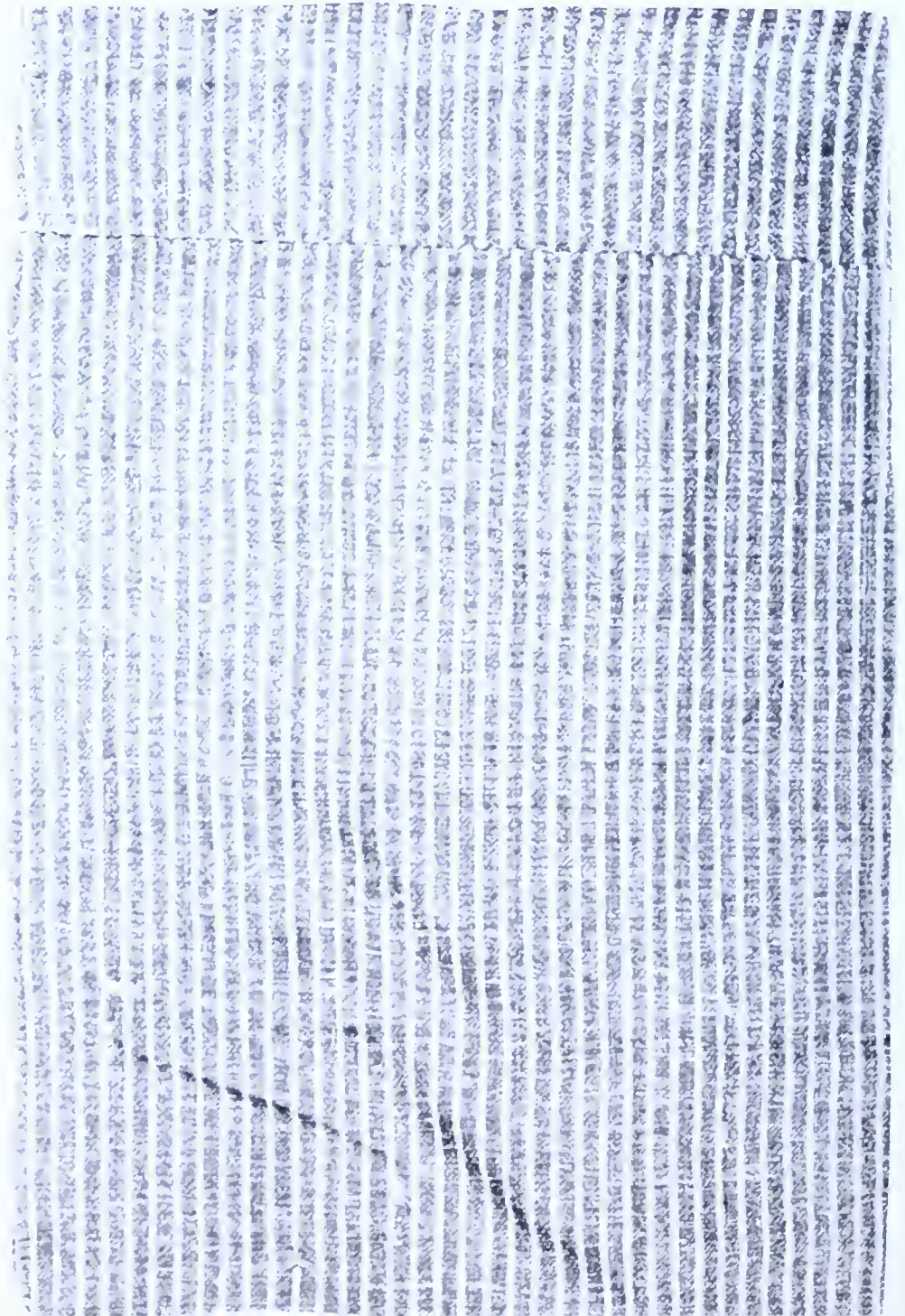




Plate 5. STOCKINGS; FM24.819A&B  
21" long with 6" foot; red and yellow  
wool

Wool stockings such as these were generally reserved for winter wear. The brilliant red and yellow is but another example of the colors that were available and used by country yeomen to brighten their appearance.

Plate 6. STOCKINGS; FM12.632A&B  
31½" long with 11¼" foot; unbleached  
tow

Knee stockings were worn during most of the year by both men and women and were held in place, either above or below the knee, with a tape knee garter. These have a red cotton cross-stitched initial "G."

Plate 7. MITTENS; FM12.633A&B  
8¼" long; red and blue wool

Homespun wool knitted in a checkerboard-type design made a colorful pair of mittens.

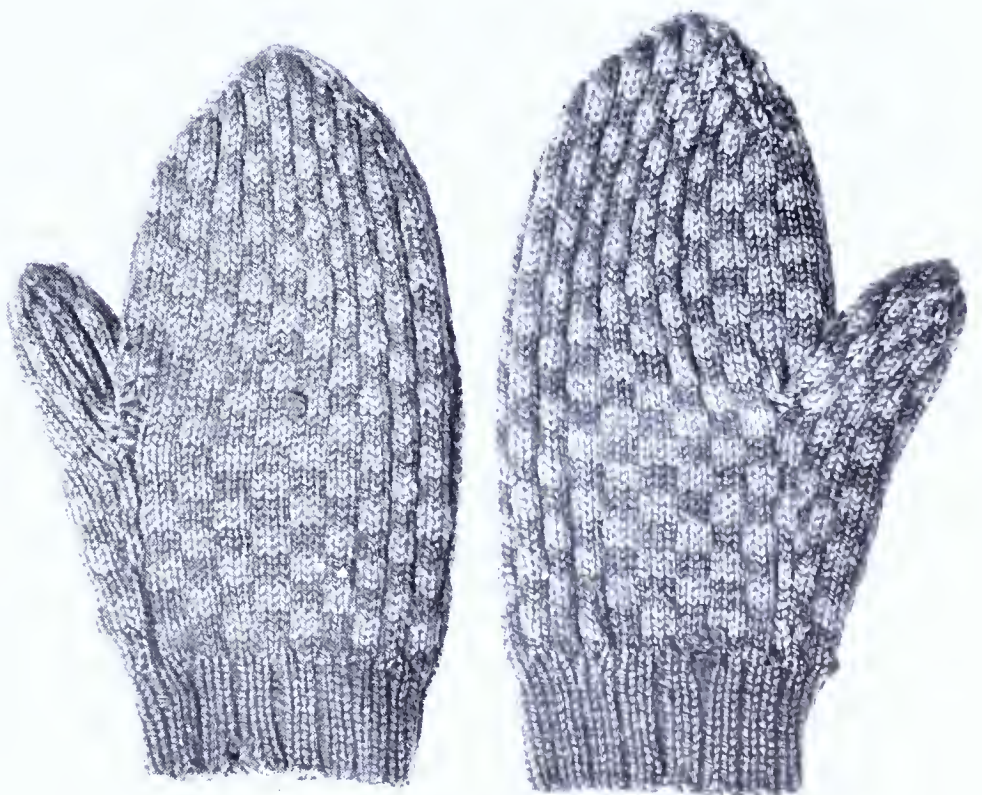


Plate 8. SHIFT; FM67.11.1

43 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 37 $\frac{1}{2}$ "; bleached linen

All hand sewn, this linen shift was worn by rural Pennsylvania German women as an undergarment. The low square neckline conforms to the cut of the shortgown which was worn on top. The general fit was loose enough to permit growth in children and pregnancy in women, without requiring extra garments. The red cotton cross-stitched initials "ASG" indicated ownership.



Plate 9. APRON; FM67.17.1

37 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ "; bleached tow and white cotton

It has been only in recent times that the apron has lost its status as an integral part of women's garb. This apron is of the workaday variety and is made from one loom width of tow fabric which is pleated to a white cotton waistband. The ties are white cotton hand-loomed tape.





Plate 10. SHIRT; FM12.665

38" x 70"; bleached linen

An important piece of men's clothing was the shirt, which was generally made of bleached or unbleached tow or linen. Needle-made embellishments added a touch of distinction, such as the red cotton cross-stitched initials "JB" on either side of the thread decoration at the base of the neck opening (Plate 10A). Stroke gathers, fine topstitching, and the so-called "mice teeth" (thread loops; Plate 10B) along the outer edge of the cuff are all examples of sewing expertise. In addition, this shirt has handmade linen thread buttons used to close the collar and cuffs. Such a shirt was worn tucked inside the breeches, and the wearer tied a kerchief under the collar with a double knot.



Plate 11. SHIRT; FM67.17.5

40" x 65½"; bleached linen

This shirt is handmade in the traditional manner, except that a narrow band, stitched in place by machine, has replaced the wide collar. Red cotton was used for both the initials "IL" and the heart.

Plate 12. BED ROPE; Anonymous Loan

100'; unbleached hemp 9-ply yarn, 5/16" thick

Rope found many domestic and agricultural uses on the farmstead. Some Pennsylvania farmers made their own rope as well as raising hemp to supply rope manufactories in the larger towns and cities. Between 100 and 120 feet of rope was needed to rope a bed; shown here is a full-length hemp bed rope.

Plate 13. CHAFF BAG; BOLSTER; PILLOW; FEATHER BED; Anonymous Loan

chaff bag 79" x 53"; unbleached tow

bolster: 49½" x 20½"; unbleached linen, blue and white cotton

pillow: 30" x 19½"; unbleached tow

feather bed: 72" x 59"; unbleached linen, blue and white cotton

Both high- and low-post bedsteads were used throughout the "Dutch" country. A tow or hemp bed rope acted as the foundation for the tow-chaff bed, which was placed directly on the ropes. Blue- and white-striped fustian was generally used to make the large feather bed and feather pillows, because by weaving with a linen warp and cotton weft a close, tight-weave fabric was produced that aided in keeping the feathers inside the tick. Shown also at the head of the bed is the long tow straw bolster which helped to elevate the sleeper's head, and on that is the pillow.

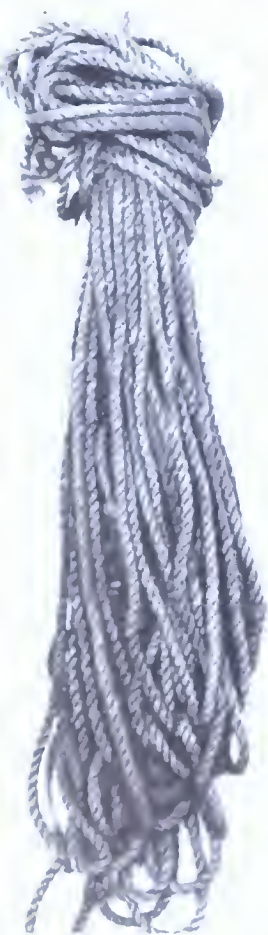




Plate 14. BED LINENS; Anonymous Loans and Pennsylvania Farm Museum

- a. Brown and bleached linen pillow case, see plate 27.
  - b. FM12.670; blue and bleached linen and cotton bolster case with red cross-stitch "E" on back. 49½" x 17 3/8".
  - c. FM12.668; blue and bleached linen bed case fragment, 80½" x 65".
  - d. FM63.13.2; blue and brown tow bolster case with tan cotton "A.B." at open end. 54¼" x 23".
  - e. Blue and brown tow pillow case with blue and white linen ties. 25¾" x 15½".
  - f. Blue linen and bleached linen and cotton bolster case, see plate 22.
- The majority of the homespun bed linens were dyed and used in two, three or four colors. Here the most commonly found colors are shown.



Plate 15. BED SHEET; Anonymous Loan

84" x 79½"; bleached linen

Most bed sheets are of utilitarian simplicity with their coarse or fine weave and a bleached or unbleached color. There were exceptions, however. The sheet seen here has a row of red and blue cotton cross-stitched embroidery across the entire width of the sheet. Included are several motifs, the maker's name and date before and after marriage, and a Pennsylvania German saying: *das ly duch gehe ret mir Elisabeth Herman und 1837 wer 1838 mirs nimt der ist ein dieb Elisabeth Scholl* ("This bed sheet belongs to me Elisabeth Herman and 1838 whoever steals it is a thief Elisabeth Scholl").

Plate 16. BED SHEET; Anonymous Loan

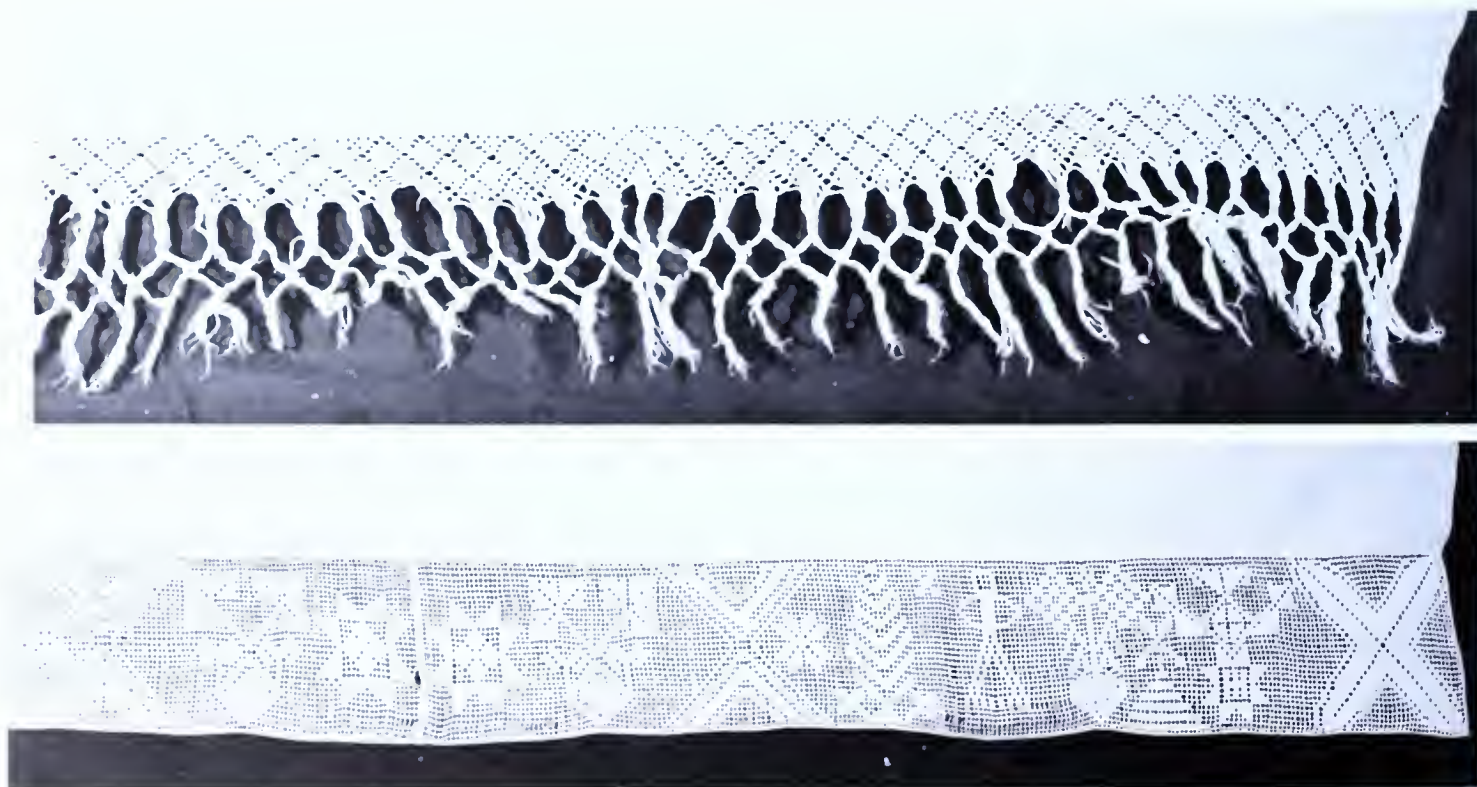
78" (plus 6½" fringe) x 80"; unbleached linen

The top edge of this bed sheet has an applied knotted-linen fringe. There are no initials or date on this sheet, but there are drawn work borders next to the knotted fringe.

Plate 17. BED SHEET; Anonymous Loan

77½" x 71"; bleached linen

Drawn thread work was commonly used on the Pennsylvania German decorated hand towel, but is seen here on a bed sheet. The motifs are worked in white cotton on the linen grid and the left half is a mirror image of the right side.



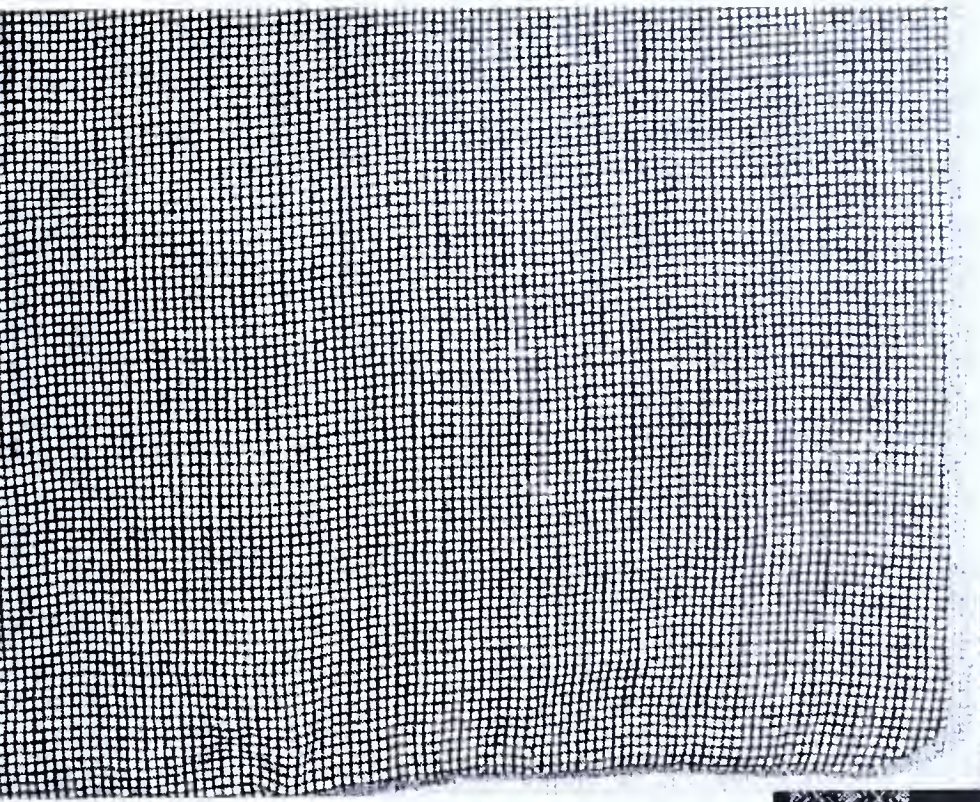


Plate 18. BED CASE; Anonymous Loan

66" x 58"; blue and bleached linen

The bed case was, as its name implies, a large case into which the bed (feather tick) was put. It was tied in place with tape ties and could easily be removed for laundering. The bed case, bolster case and pillow case were often a set that matched in color and design, and this case is part of such a set as seen on the bed in this exhibit. This bed case has the typical white center panel on the back, and the ties are brown, blue and white homemade tape.

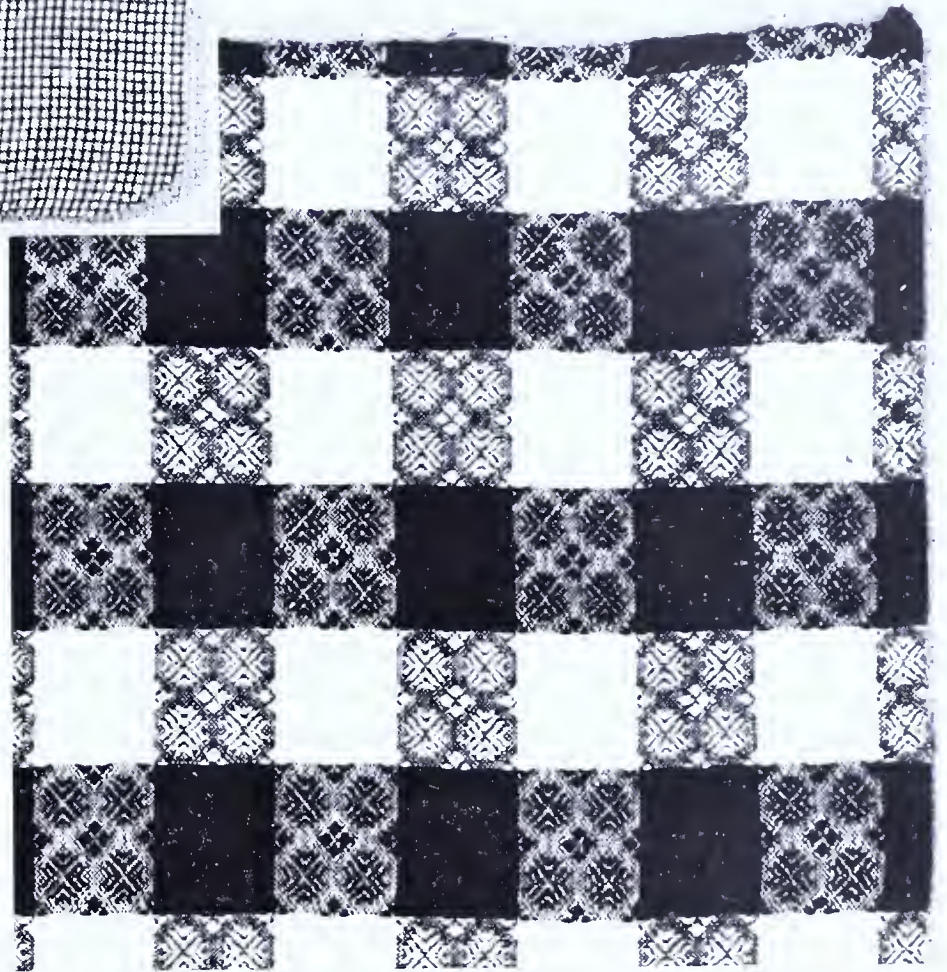


Plate 19. BED CASE; Anonymous Loan

54" x 39½"; blue and bleached linen

WEAVERS PATTERN BOOK; Anonymous Loan

8" x 6 5/8"

Pattern weaves were also used when weaving yardage for bedding. Shown here is a sixteen-harness *hin und weider* bed case fragment. Pictured with it is a page from a manuscript weaver's pattern book (Plate 19A) in which pattern number six shows the tie-up for weaving this design. This book belonged to an unnamed weaver in York County, Pennsylvania.

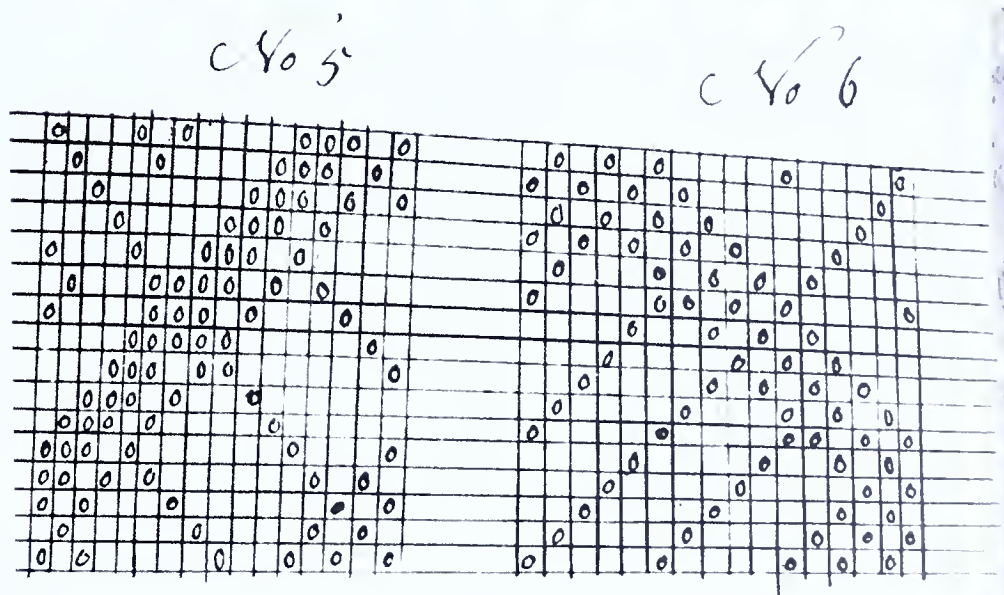


Plate 20. BOLSTER CASE; Anonymous Loan

50½" x 19"; blue and bleached linen  
Fabrics used for bedding by the Pennsylvania Germans included an interesting assortment of colors and designs. The following three bolster cases represent what was at one time typical bedding material. This bolster case is a part of the matched set of bed case, bolster case and pillow cases used on the bed in this exhibit.

Plate 21. BOLSTER CASE; Anonymous Loan

42" x 20¼"; brown and unbleached tow  
The coarseness of the weave (thirty warp threads per inch) in this striped bolster case indicates that it is tow rather than linen. The coarseness or roughness of this piece probably did not adversely affect the sleeper because a feather pillow was used on top of the straw bolster.

Plate 22. BOLSTER CASE; Anonymous Loan

49½" x 18½"; blue linen and bleached linen and cotton

Typical of the plaids used for bedding, this bolster case has white linen tape ties to hold the case in place on top of the bolster tick.

Plate 23. BOLSTER CASE; Anonymous Loan

58" x 17"; bleached linen indigo dyed by the resist printing method

The resist dyeing technique was a specialty with the Pennsylvania German dyer and his product found great popularity with the farm women. Blue and white resist-dyed homespun linen was frequently made into bedding, such as this bolster case. It is interesting to note that a narrow border was printed along the open end.

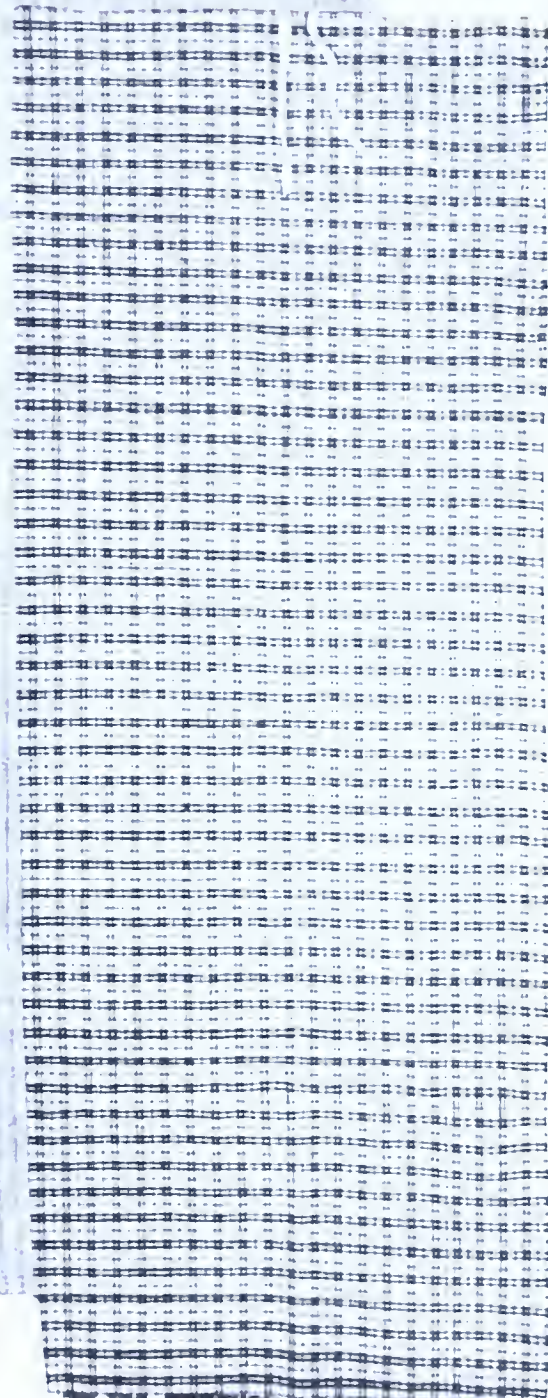


Plate 24. PILLOW CASE; Anonymous  
Loan

32" x 19"; bleached linen indigo dyed  
by the resist printing method

This pillow case is another example of Penn-  
sylvania resist-dyed patterns. A bed dressed  
with such fabric added much color to a  
country home.



Plate 25. PILLOW CASE; Anonymous  
Loan

17 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 11"; bleached tow indigo dyed  
by the resist printing method

In the instance shown here, a tow fabric  
rather than linen was resist-dyed and the  
yardage made into a small-size pillow case.

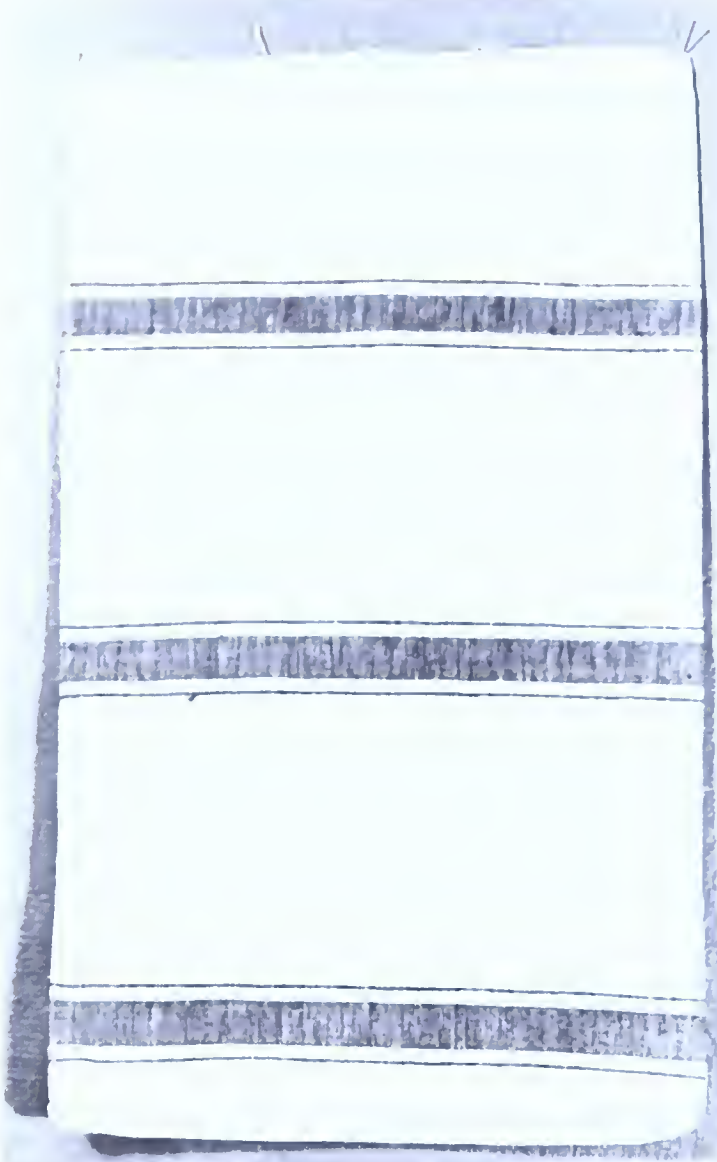


Plate 26. PILLOW TICK: Anonymous Loan

23 3/8" x 13 7/8"; bleached linen and blue and white cotton

Feathers needed for bedding were an initial expense when setting up housekeeping. If they were to last a lifetime, it was important for the feathers to be encased in a tight-weave fabric, such as this fustian pillow tick. After the feathers were placed inside, the tick was sewn closed and a pillow case put on top.



Plate 27. PILLOW CASE: Anonymous Loan

29" x 19 1/4"; brown and bleached linen

The color combination of brown and white was used for bedding as well as blue and white. This pillow case has white linen home-made tapes.

Plate 28. CHAIR CUSHION CASE:

Anonymous Loan

16½" x 16½"; blue and bleached linen

There were times when pillows were made to be used as chair cushions, and they required a pillow case such as the one pictured here. There is decorative white feather-stitching along the seam lines.

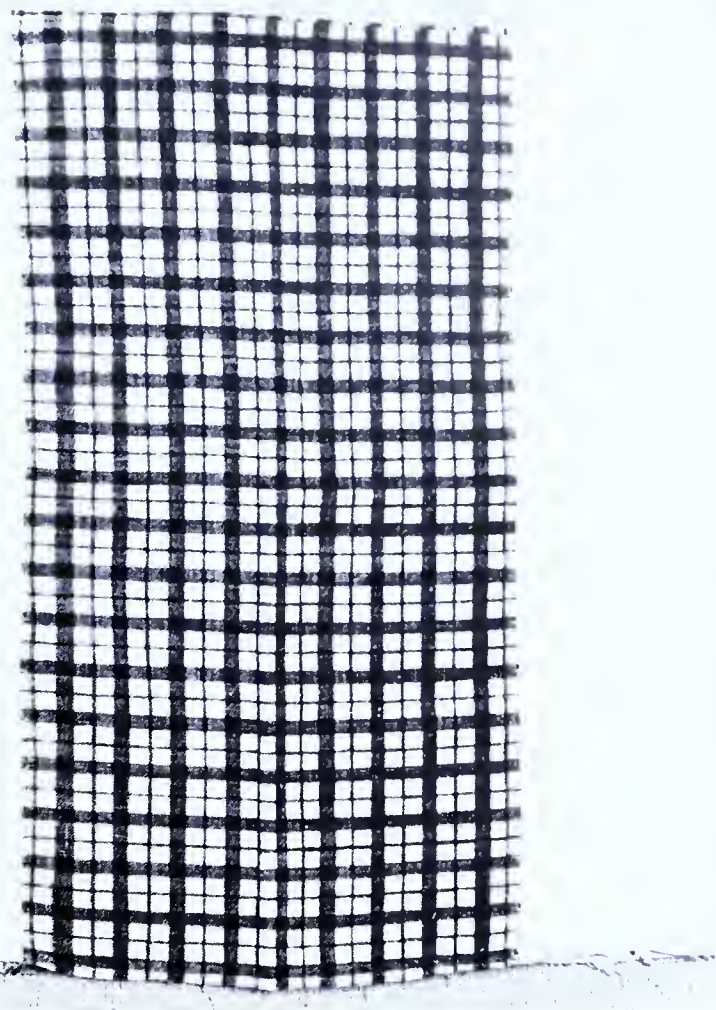
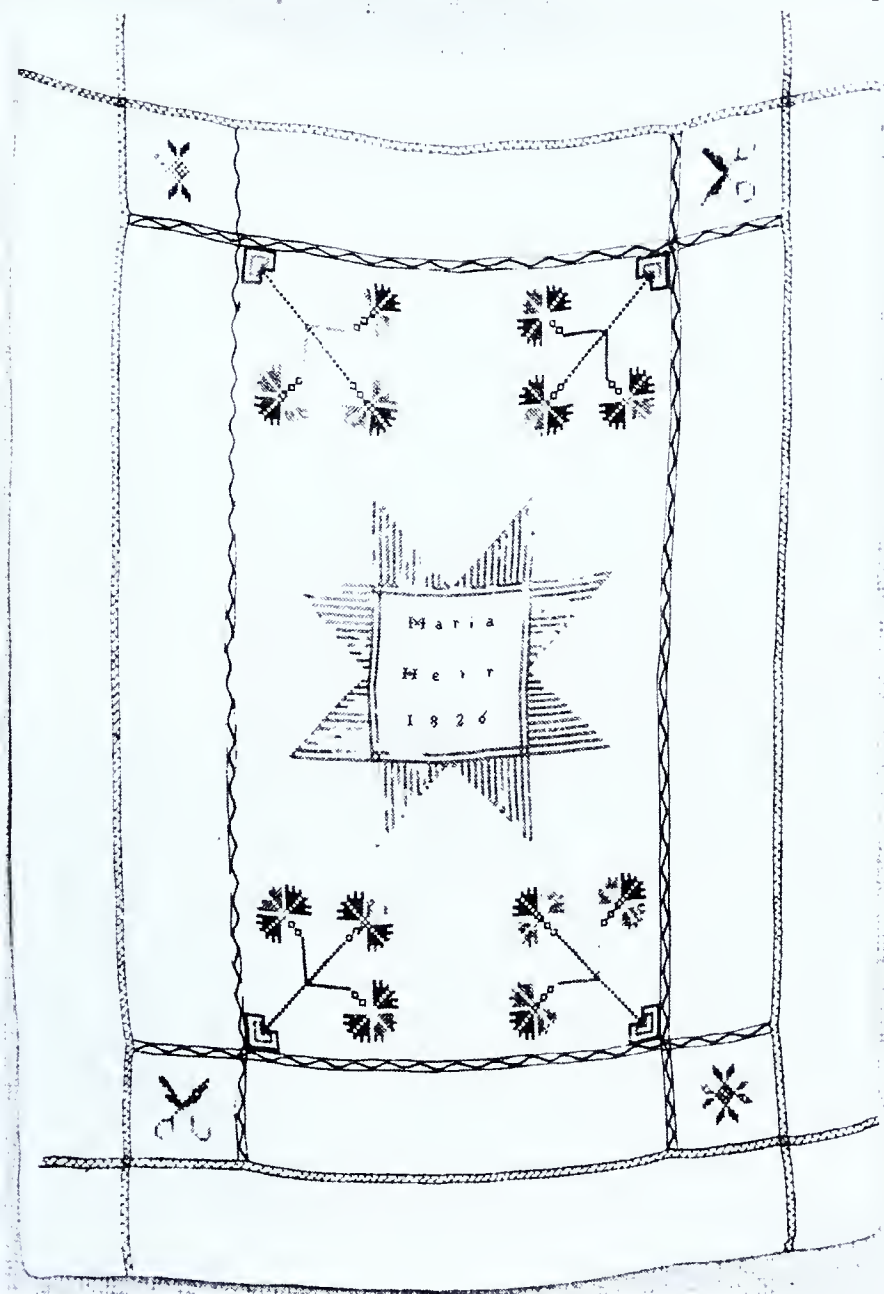


Plate 29. PILLOW CASE; Anonymous Loan

23¾" x 17"; bleached linen

More decorative than utilitarian, this finely woven pillow case contains embroidered borders and motifs worked in the outline, chain and cross-stitch. The name and date, "Maria Herr, 1826," appear in the central star. Red cotton and black and light brown silk floss were used for the embroidery.

Plate 30. PILLOW CASE; Anonymous Loan

26½" x 18½"; bleached cotton

The fact that this early pillow case is made of cotton indicates it probably was made and reserved for special occasions. Dark and light brown, pink, and white silk floss were used to create the somewhat plain motifs, including the center design that is surrounded with the letters "OEHBDDDE," which stand for: *O Edles Herz Bedenke Dein End* ("O beloved heart consider your end"). There are also the initials "BH" and the year "1802." Note the lace insertion to the right along the folded edge.

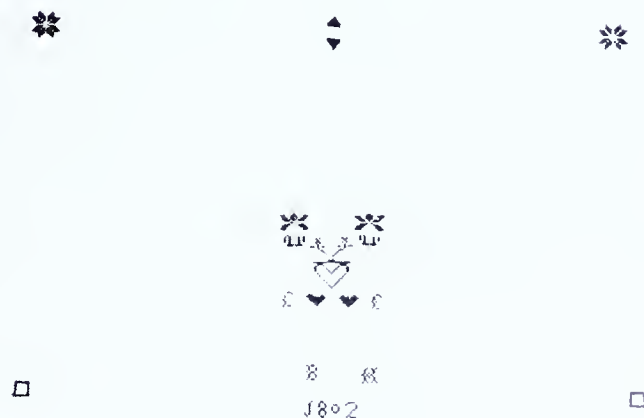


Plate 32. DETAIL OF CONESTOGA  
WAGON COVER

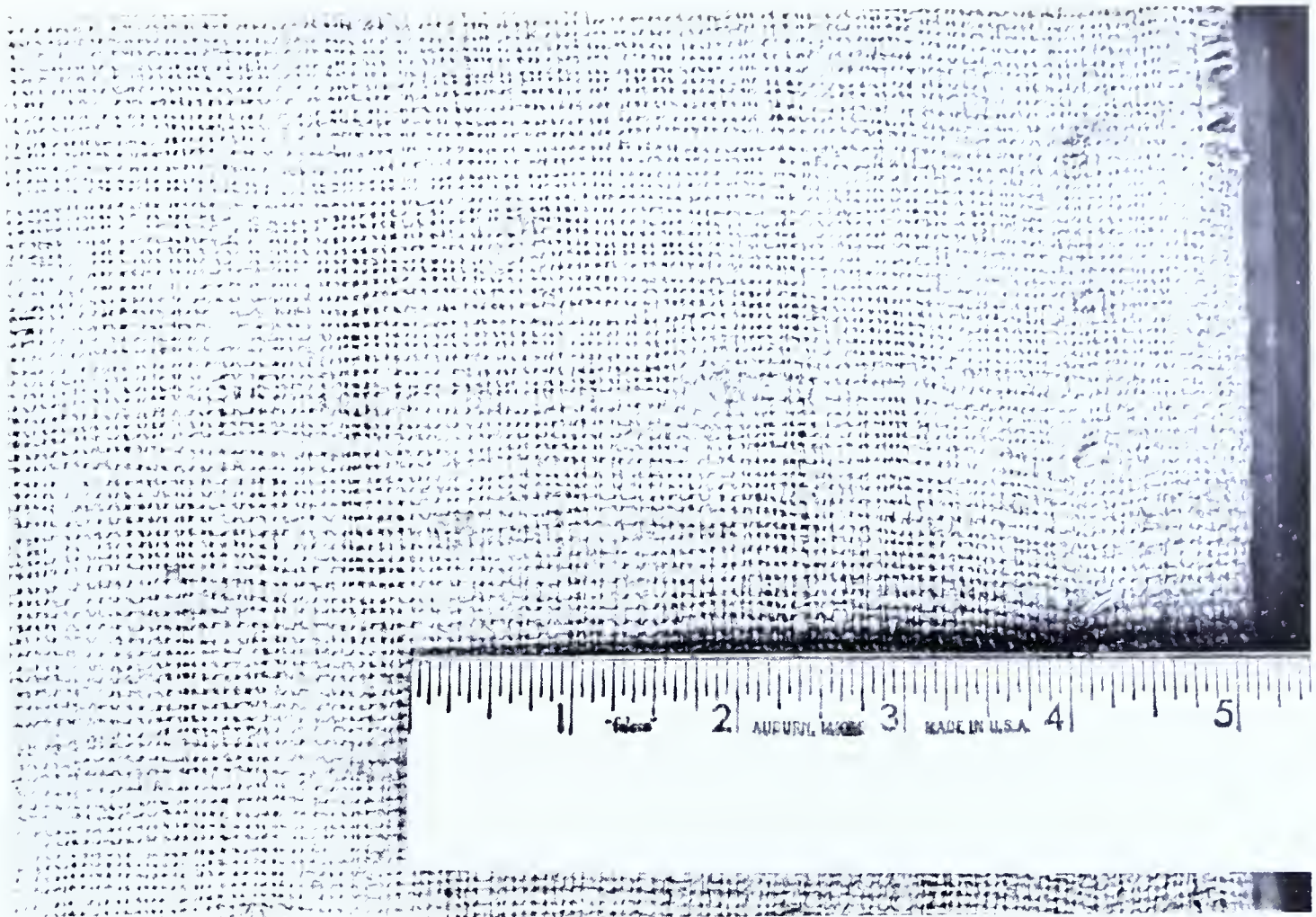
284" x 98"; unbleached tow

The coarseness of the weave is apparent in this illustration. The cover is in the collection of the Pennsylvania Farm Museum.

Plate 31. WAGON COVER

Heavy farm wagons and Conestoga wagons throughout the homespun period were provided with coarse-tow wagon covers, sometimes with the owner's name painted on them. Even though the covers were not waterproof, they did afford some protection to the cargo. Wagon covers were the largest homespun items used in Pennsylvania. This photograph, dating c. 1900, is in the collection of the Pennsylvania Farm Museum.





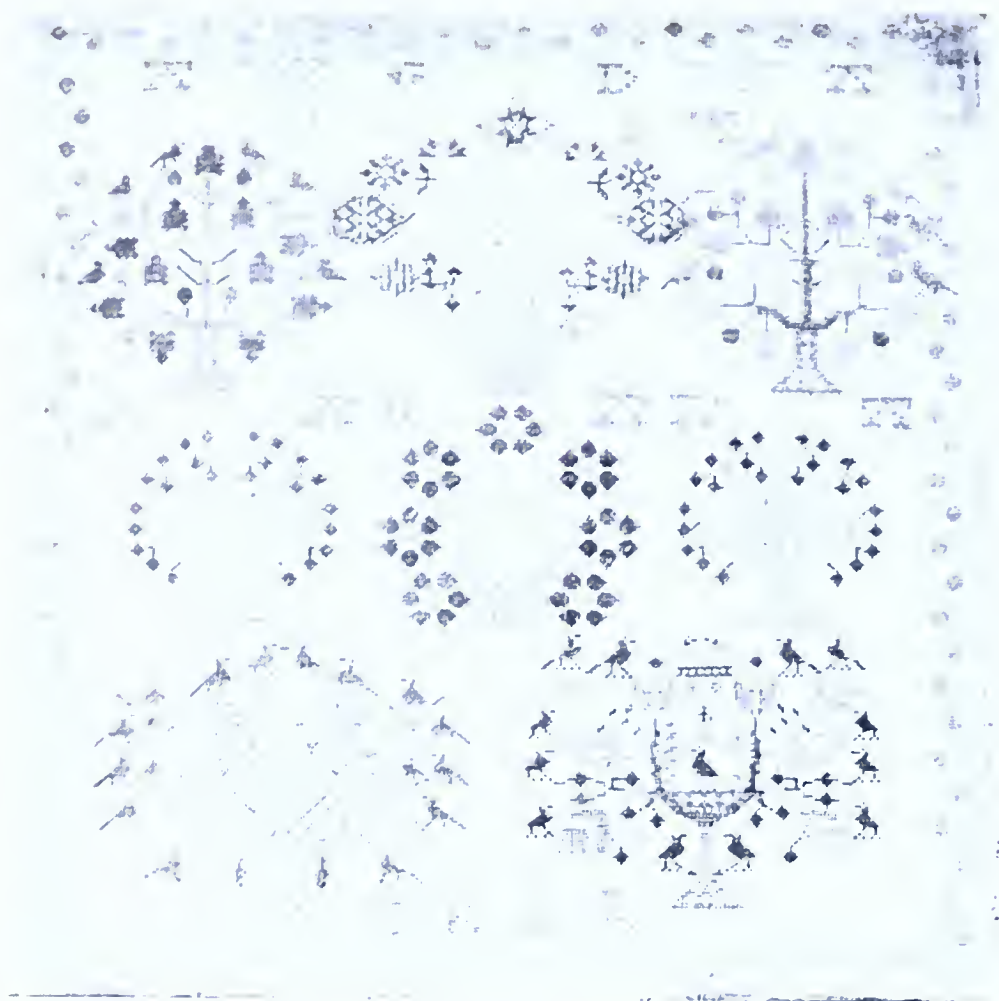


Plate 33. NEEDLEWORK PICTURE:  
Anonymous Loan

17" x 17"; bleached linen and cotton  
Needlework pictures became popular with the Pennsylvania Germans during the nineteenth century. The farm wife designed a well-balanced picture that was framed and hung on the wall. The designs in this picture are worked in green, yellow-green, red and tan silk floss.



Plate 34. SAMPLER: Anonymous Loan  
16 3/8" x 16"; bleached linen

Numerals, letters and motifs seen on Pennsylvania German samplers were collected by women and young girls and recorded with needle and thread for future household use. The samplers were often square in shape with fringed or hemmed edges, and the motifs were usually worked in a counted-thread cross-stitch in cotton or silk floss or both. This "M Magdalene Kurtz 1833" sampler uses red, white and blue cotton as well as dark brown, tan and gold silk embroidery floss. The alphabet, in large letters, is at the top of the sampler under the name and date.

Plate 35. SAMPLER; FM74.4.7

11 5/8" x 11 1/8"; bleached linen

Also square in shape and having fringed edges, this sampler included cross-stitched motifs worked in brown, gold, blue and pink floss. At the top is stitched "LIEMHNLUAE LH ILIM HIMMEL IKGFLBCM," the meaning of which we cannot determine.

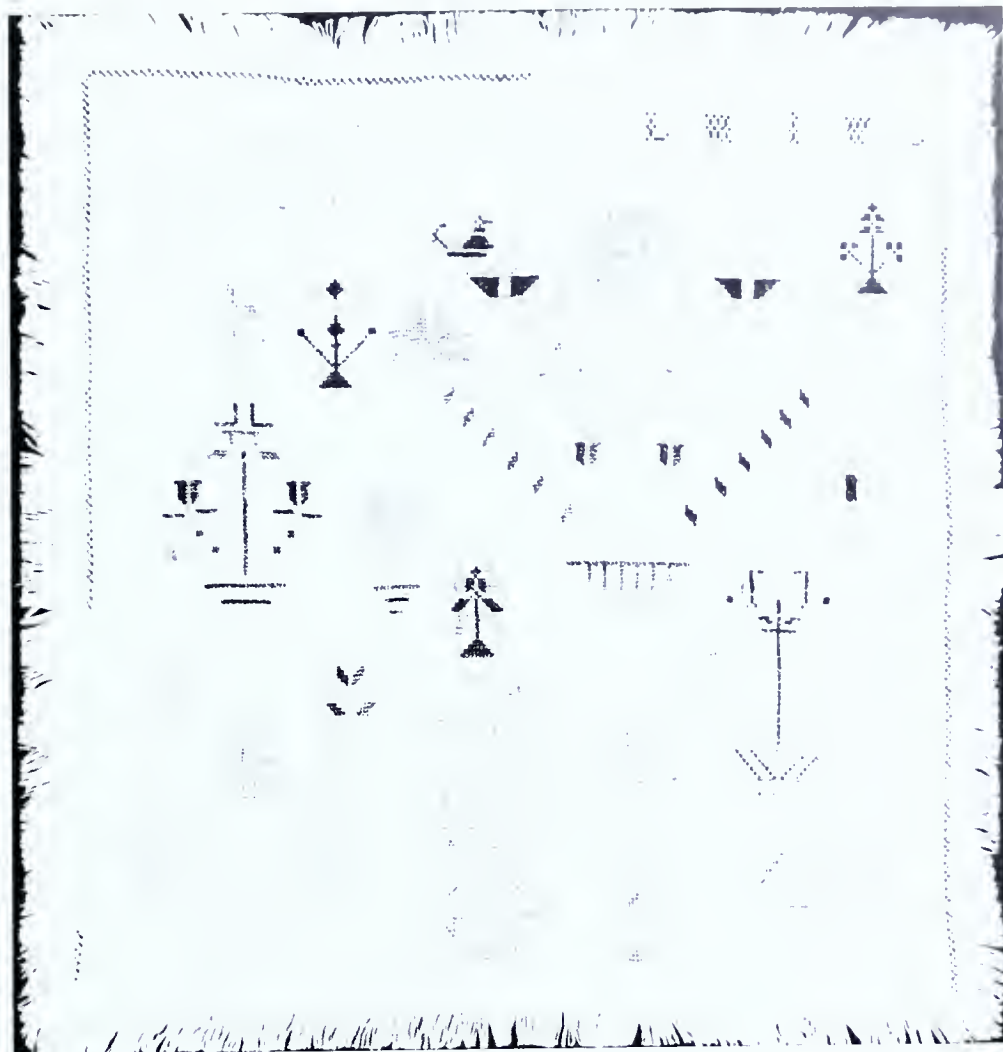
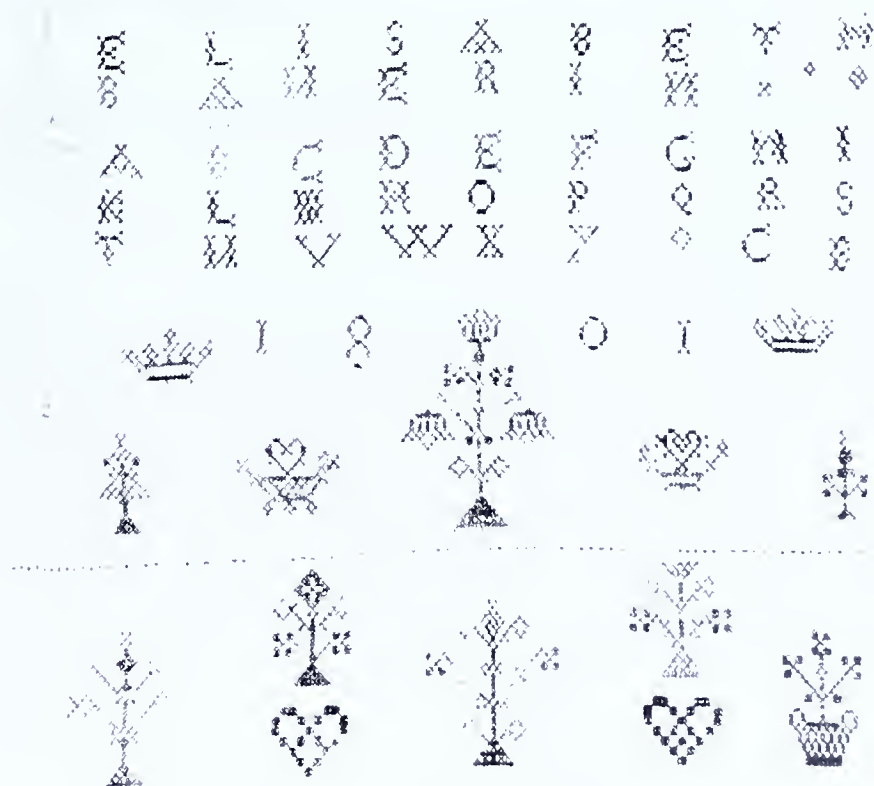


Plate 36. SAMPLER; Anonymous Loan  
11 1/2" x 11 1/4"; bleached linen

Elisabeth Banerin made this sampler in 1801 and included the alphabet along with various motifs and the initials "CB." The entire sampler is worked in dark brown silk floss, except the borders, which are red cotton.



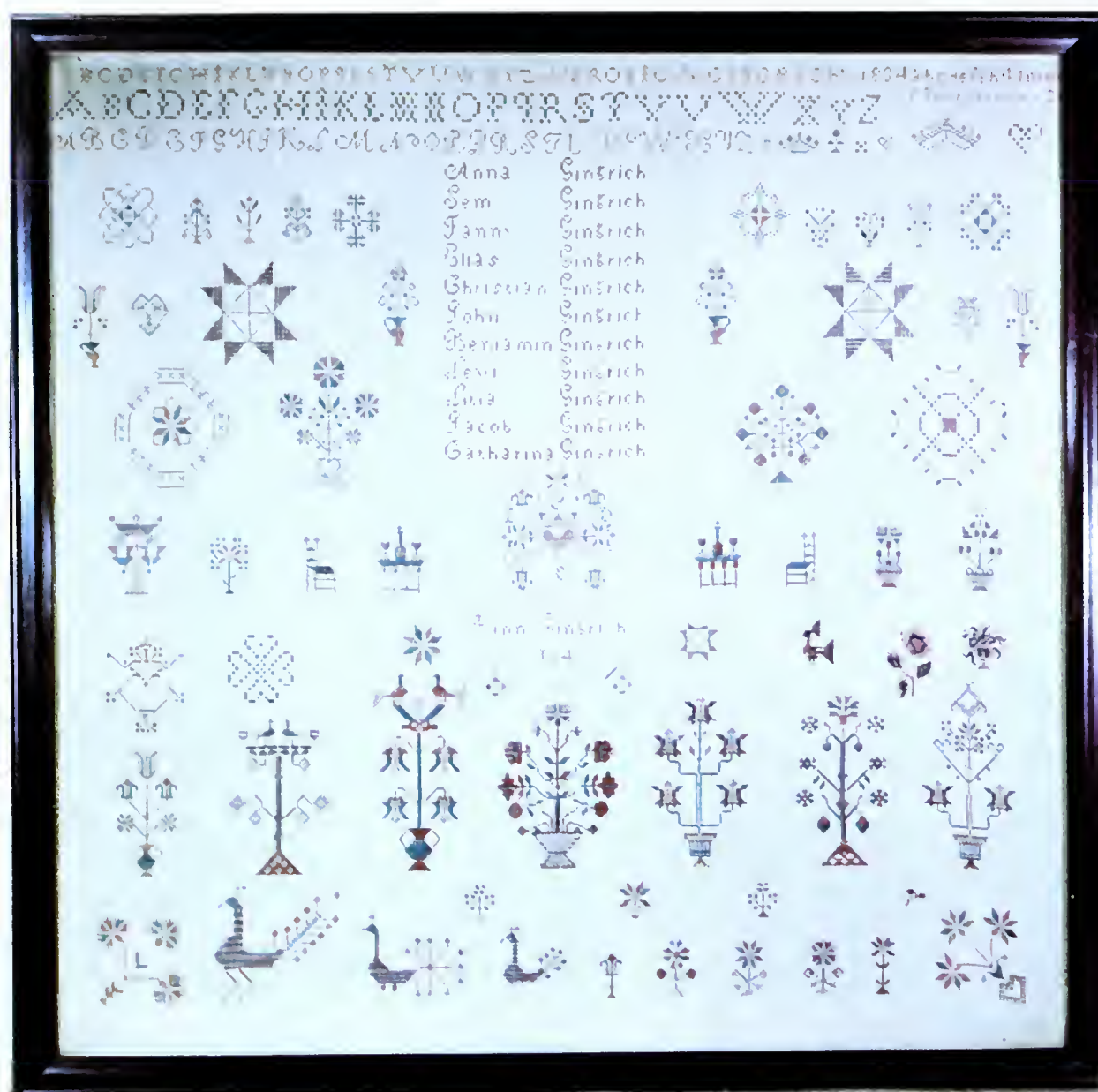


Plate 37. FAMILY REGISTER. Anonymous Loan  
 25" x 25½"; bleached linen worked in various colors of cotton.

This piece, made by "Veronica Gingrich," was probably started as a sampler, and as work progressed, it became a needlework picture family record. Dated 1831 and 1843.

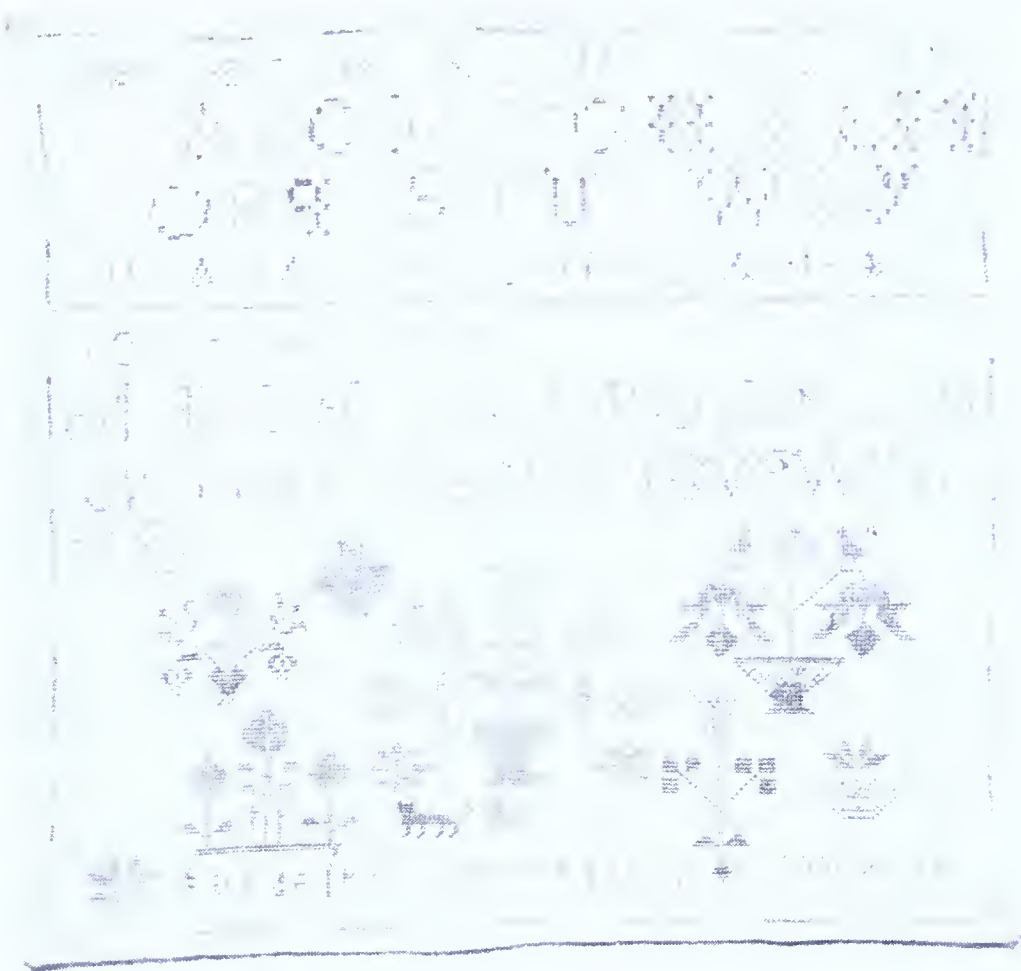


Plate 38. SAMPLER; Anonymous Loan  
9¼" x 9¾"; bleached linen

Large and small alphabets, a script alphabet and the numbers 1 to 10 were stitched on this sampler as well as the maker's name, date and place of residence. It is signed "Susana Wahl in Elsas 1840." Red cotton as well as brown, tan, yellow and light blue-green silk embroidery floss were used, and the edges were hemmed rather than fringed.

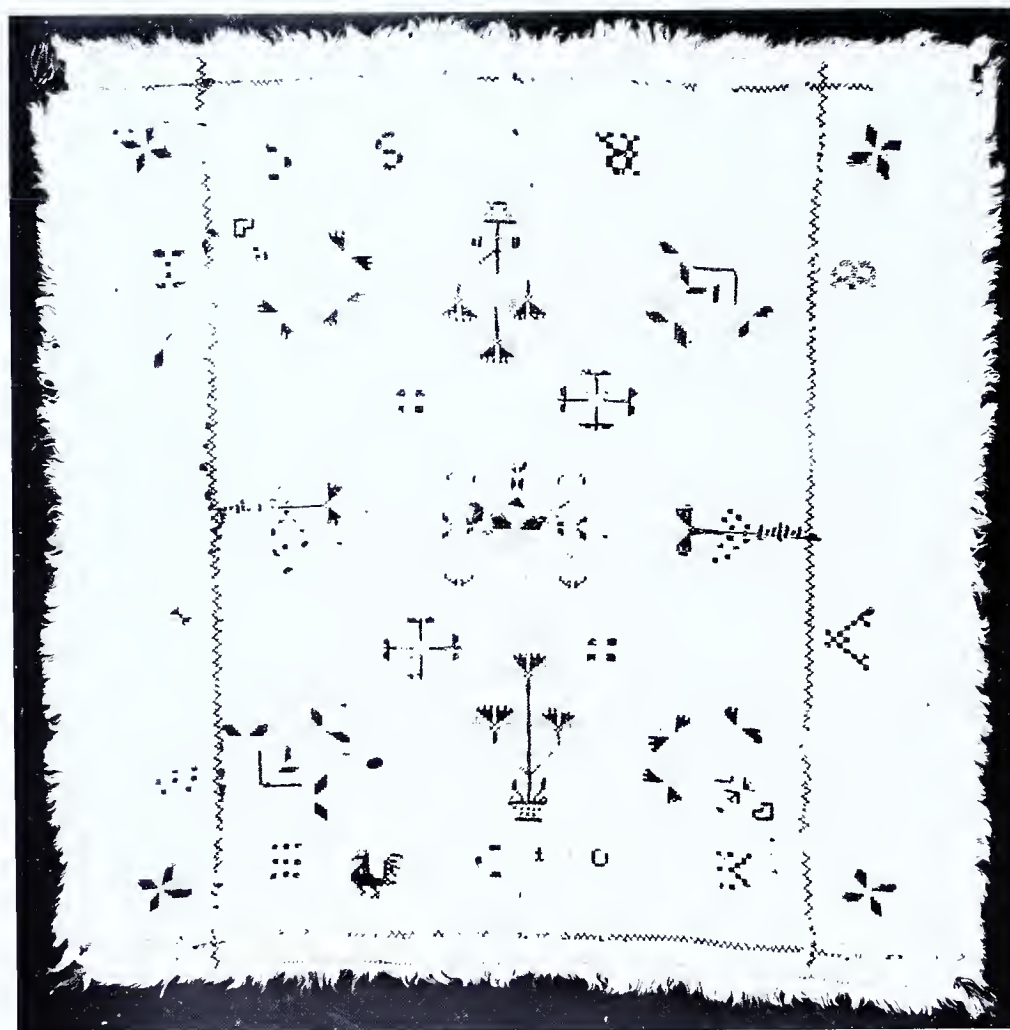


Plate 39. TABLECLOTH; Anonymous Loan  
21½" x 22"; bleached linen

This tablecloth was for the small, square stand-type table and not the larger table at which people ate. Forming a border around the outside edge is the maker's name and date, "Barbara Schenck 1803." The cross-stitched motifs are in black, tan and white silk, and there are black and tan silk tassels in each corner. The fringe along the outside edges is applied.

Plate 40. HAND TOWEL: Anonymous  
Loan

44½" x 19¼"; unbleached tow

One of the most common, but useful, textiles found inside the house was the hand towel. It was generally made of a medium- or fine-grade tow, bleached or unbleached, and it had one or two tabs for hanging. The hand towel was usually devoid of decorative stitchery except for an occasional initial or number. The natural-color tow towel pictured here has a self-fringe along the bottom edge, and the tabs at the top are a five-strand tow braid.

Plate 41. LACE: Anonymous Loan  
48" x 3¼"; unbleached linen, 3-strand  
thread

Although this homespun, hand-knitted lace was never used, it was probably intended for use along the hem of a woman's petticoat.



Plate 42. DECORATED HAND TOWEL; Anonymous Loan

64" x 16¾"; bleached linen

The decorated hand towel was one medium where the artistic creative abilities of the Pennsylvania German farm wife came to the fore. The towel shown here was made by "Fanny Witmer 1847" and is typical in that red and blue cotton embroidery floss was used throughout, and the panels were laid out with the designs placed in a mirror image. Note the alphabet along the top edge and the tabs that extend from the sides of the towel rather than from the top.

Plate 43. DECORATED HAND TOWEL; FM24.821

64" x 16½"; bleached linen

Multi-color wools, light blue, yellow, red, gold, pink and dark blue, were used to create the designs on this towel. The name of the maker, Catherine Leaman, appears under the knotted fringe at the top. The initials "AL BL" appear near the top.



Plate 44. DECORATED HAND TOWEL; FM24.820

62" x 16¾"; bleached linen

When Catherine B. Leaman made this towel in 1851, she used red, yellow, cream and pink-beige wool yarn, as well as the usual red and blue cotton floss, to embroider the motifs. She included an inscription which reads, "catherine leaman is my name heven is my station lampeter is my twelling plase christ is my salvathion the rose is ret the leaves are grean the day a is past witch I hav sean when I am dead and in my grave and when mi bones are all rotten and when you se this remember me unless I be forgotten 1851." The names of David and Mary Buckwalter and Abraham and Barbara Leaman also appear on the towel, as well as an applied knotted fringe along the bottom edge.

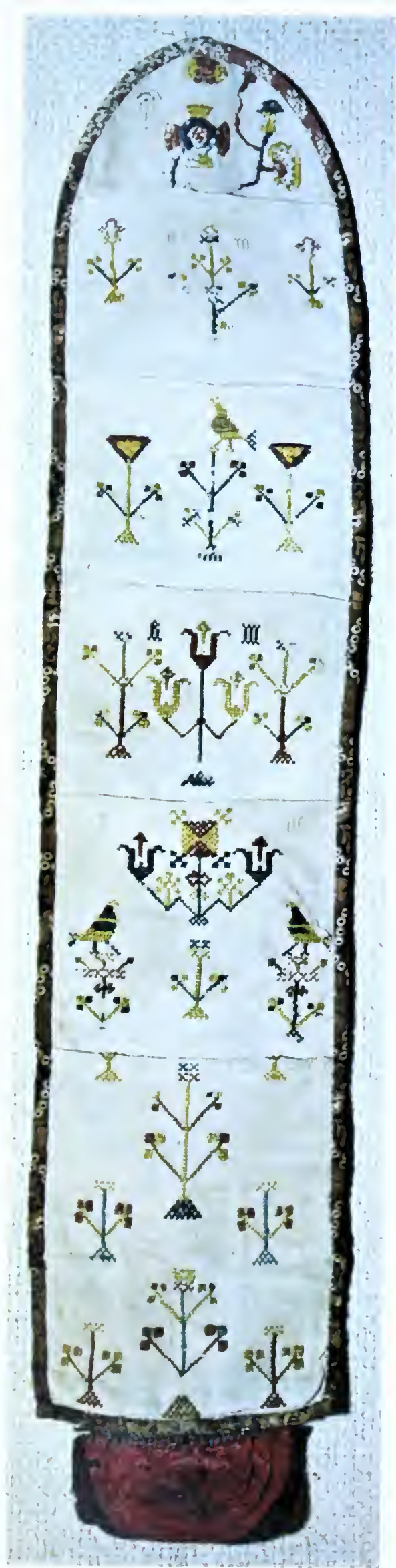


Plate 15. THREAD CASE: Anonymous Loan

21" x 4½"; bleached linen worked in yellow, gold, red, blue and brown wool. The reverse is chintz.

This case, which once occupied a valued place in a Pennsylvania German woman's sewing basket, is decorated with the same motifs found on other Pennsylvania needlework. The pouches at the top were used for storage of various sewing and embroidery threads, and the wool flaps at the bottom were for needles.

Plate 46. PIN CUSHION: Anonymous Loan

2¼" in diameter, 2½" high; unbleached tow

The pin cushion was another of the home-spun needlework tools found in the sewing basket in the kitchen.





Plate 47. DECORATED HAND TOWEL; Anonymous Loan  
58" (plus a 3½" knotted fringe) x 16"; bleached linen

Drawn thread panels often appear on the decorated hand towel either by themselves or with other forms of embroidery. They were made by removing groups of threads in both the horizontal and vertical direction to form a grid on which to embroider designs. These designs were often worked with a heavy white cotton thread as in the towel shown here. In addition, Elisabeth Diehl used white linen thread to make the counted-thread satin stitch motifs seen at the top and bottom of the towel.

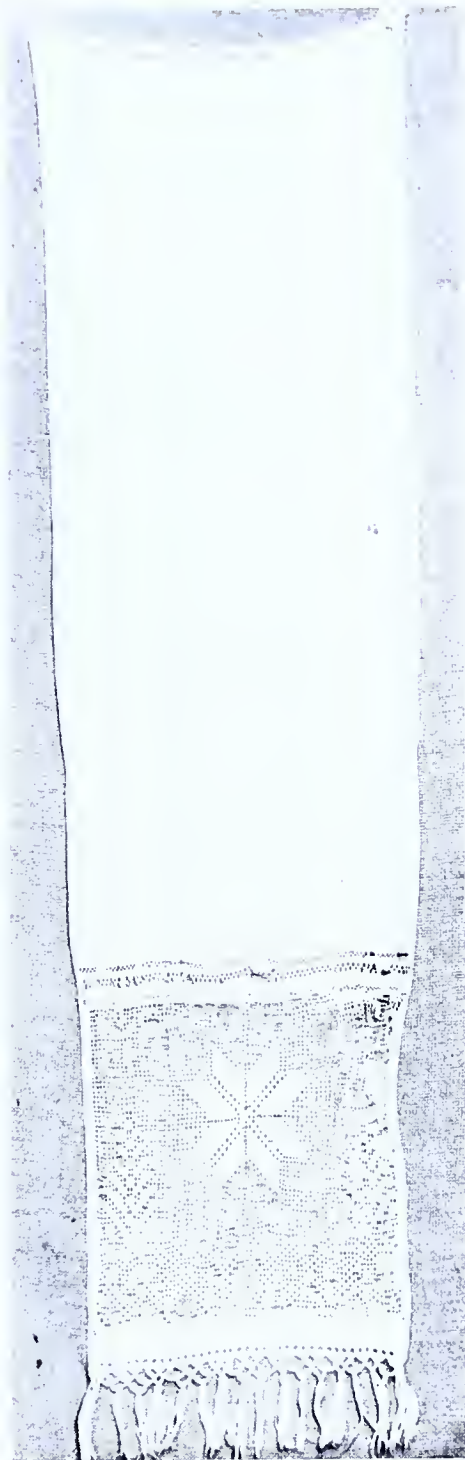


Plate 48. DECORATED HAND TOWEL; FM63.19

54½" x 14¾"; bleached linen

Pictured here is another all-white decorated hand towel with the birds and floral design worked with white cotton thread on the linen fabric. The initials and date "MW 1827" are under the motif (plate 48A). There is a drawn-thread border at the top and bottom of the towel as well as the drawn panel. White cotton was used to make the star and trees, diamonds and borders in this panel, and a knotted fringe was applied to the bottom edge.





Plate 49. MARKET WALLET; Anonymous Loan

38 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ "; bleached tow

The market wallet was filled through the slot in the middle with store goods or produce so that amounts of equal weight were placed in each end. The wallet was gathered in the middle and carried over the person's shoulder, with half the load in front and half in back and the slot on the shoulder.

Plate 50. NEEDLE CASE; Anonymous Loan

9 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ "; black wool binding, blue silk fringe, red twill wool top and bottom, printed cotton in center front, homespun green wool back and silk ribbon tab.

A needlecase was included in the contents of most sewing baskets. In the early period most women kept their sewing basket with their thread, scissors and needlework tools in the "kitchen dresser."

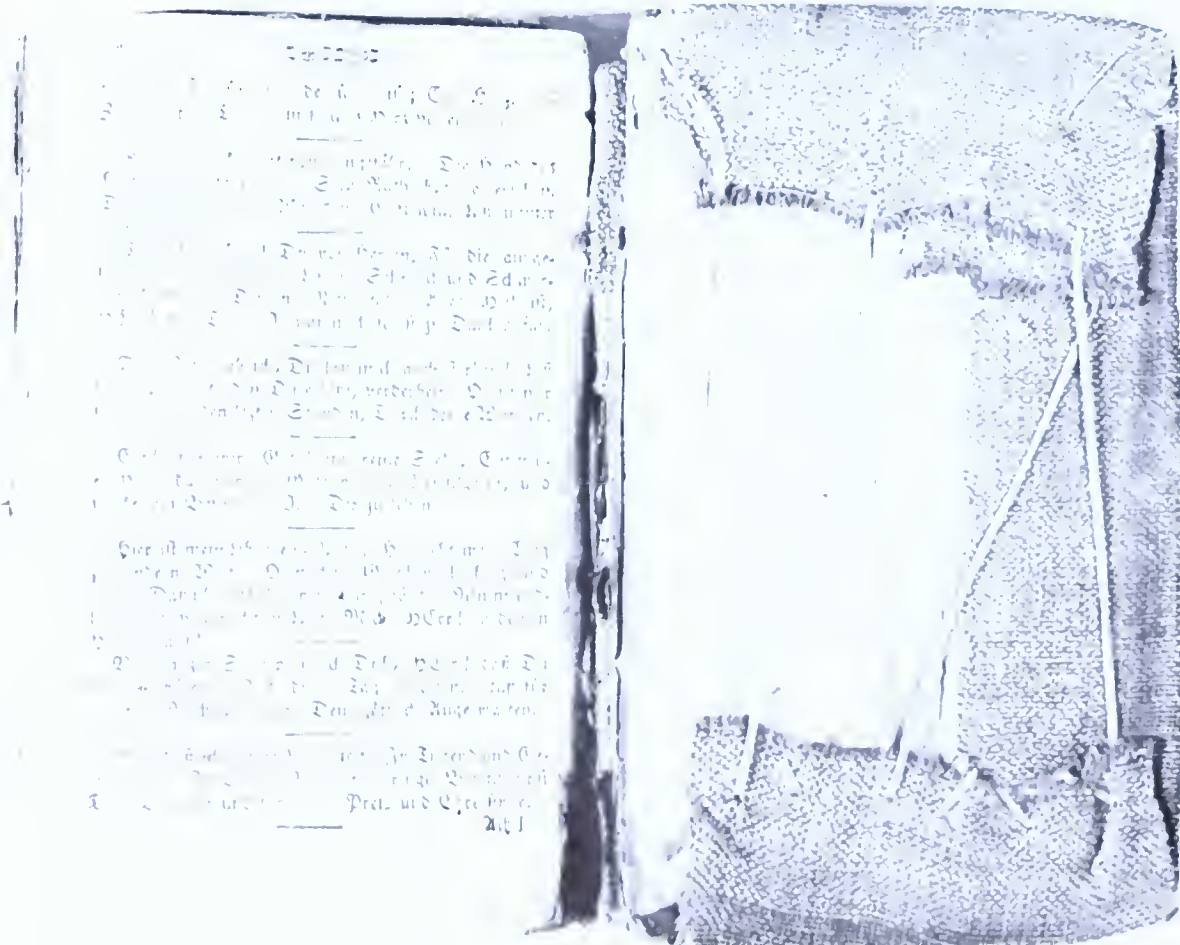


Plate 51. BOOK COVER; Anonymous Loan

6 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ "; unbleached tow

School books have always received hard wear at the hands of children, and in an age when school books were used by perhaps two to three generations, protection was important. The book is the *Lesebuch für Deutsche Schulkinder*, . . . printed in Philadelphia in 1795 by Carl Cist.

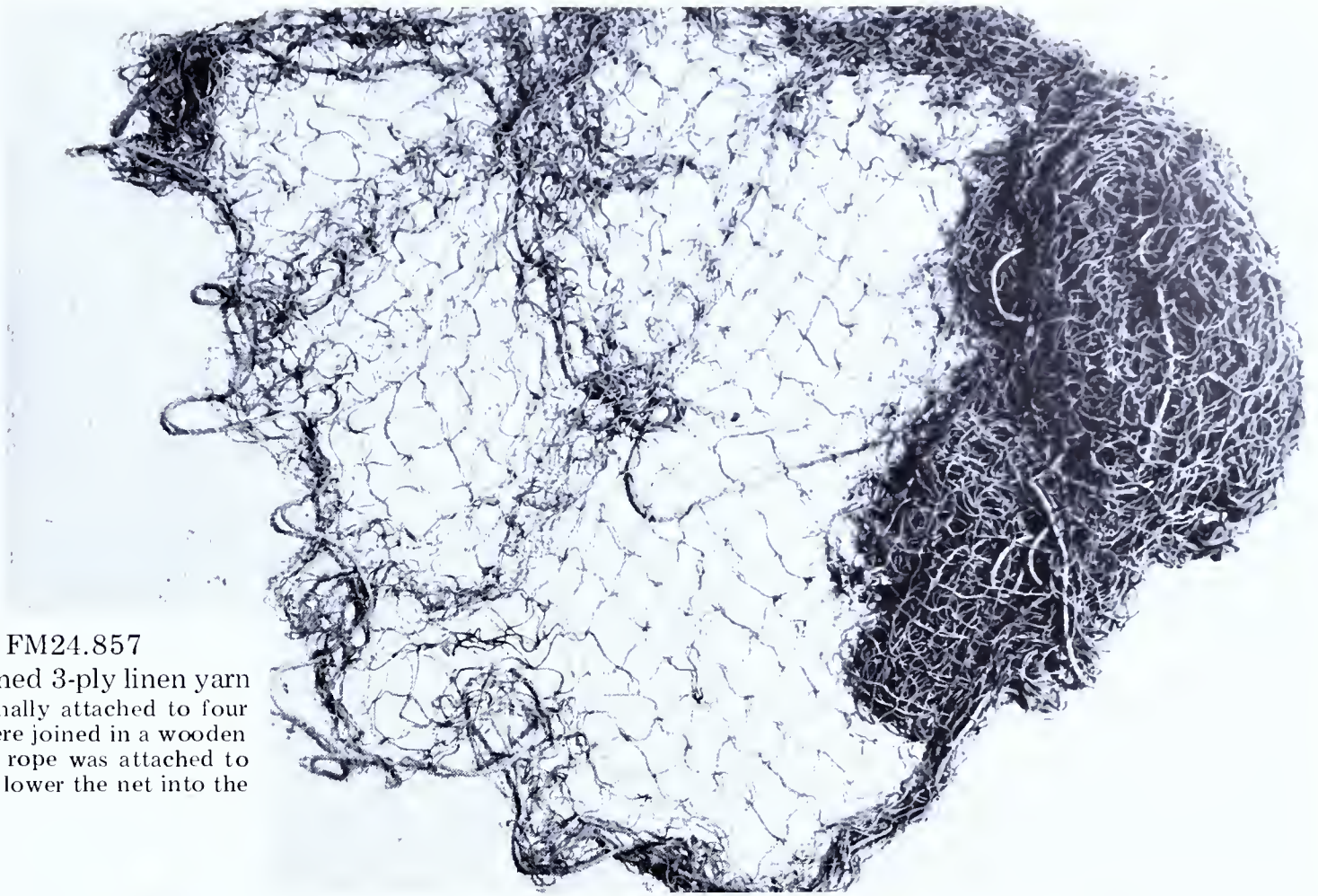


Plate 52. DIP NET; FM24.857

83" x 83"; unbleached 3-ply linen yarn  
This dip net was originally attached to four wooden bows which were joined in a wooden block in the center. A rope was attached to the block and used to lower the net into the water.



Plate 53. GILL NET; FM24.856

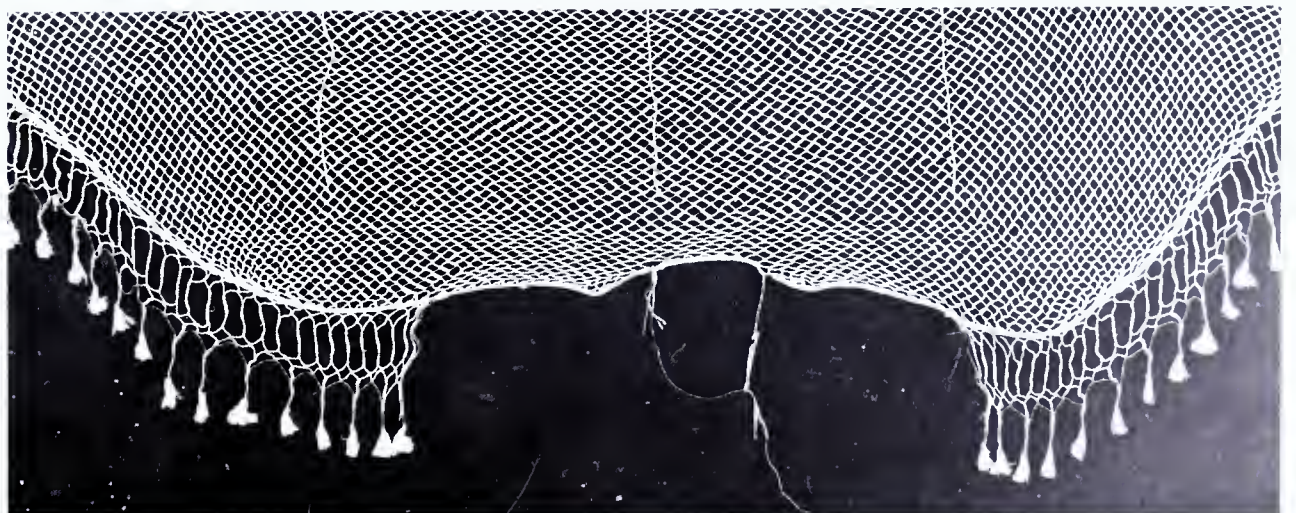
48" x 48"; unbleached tow 3-ply netting

This net, with drawn hickory handles, was held by the fishermen standing in the water and used to scoop the fish from the water. The net has three-eighth-inch openings, and at the top has two floats of poplar wood attached to the cord. At the bottom four lead weights are attached to the cord.

Plate 54. FLY NETTING FOR A HORSE; Anonymous Loan

63" x 28" plus a 7" fringe; bleached tow 12-ply yarn made of 3 strands of 4-ply yarn

This is one-half of the net, which was once tied to the other half by the three ties hanging from the top of the net. The loop in the center bottom was tied around the leather shaft carrier. The abundance of flies in the summer necessitated the use of fly nets.



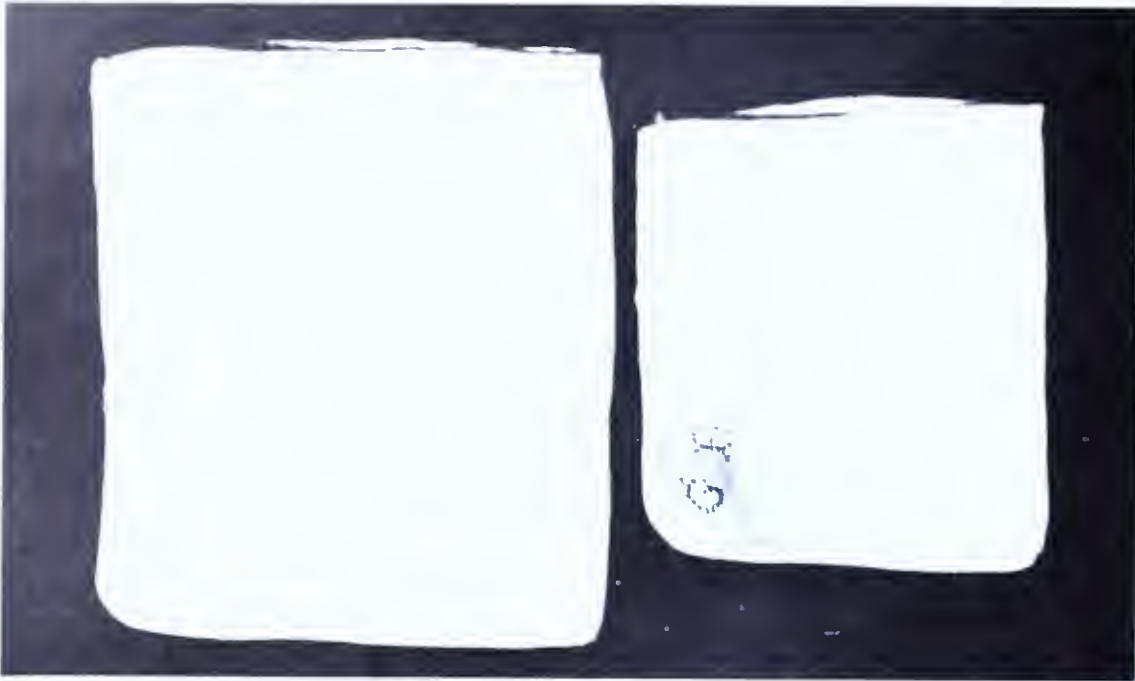


Plate 55. GARDEN SEED BAGS;

Left, FM12.802 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 4 $\frac{7}{8}$ "

Right, FM12.816 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 3 $\frac{7}{8}$ "

bleached linen, red and blue cotton cross-stitched embroidery

Garden seeds were raised by the housewife in her garden, dried and stored. Small bags of this type were used to keep the seeds from one year to the next.

Plate 56. MONEY BAG; FM24.838

11 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 6 $\frac{3}{8}$ "; brown and unbleached linen, blue-printed cotton ties

A note inside the bag indicates "Binkley money bag." In addition to homespun bags, money was kept in various containers ranging from an old linen stocking hanging in the kitchen fireplace chimney to apple butter crocks filled with a mixture of gold and apple butter.



Plate 57. RESIST-DYED BAG; FM12.678

10 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ "; bleached linen indigo dyed by the resist method

The original use of this bag has been lost.



C. BENDER  
No. 15. 1952

Plate 58. GRAIN BAG; Anonymous  
Loan

50" x 21"; unbleached tow, twill weave  
This bag, with the stenciled label, was once  
C. Bender's fifteenth bag.

Plate 59. GRAIN BAG; FM9.978

35" x 21½"; unbleached tow, twill  
weave

This one-bushel grain bag was hand colored  
in red paint with what appears to be a great  
horned owl or perhaps an elbedritsch. The  
farmer's initials "A.R." appear on the other  
side.





Plate 60. GRAIN BAG; Anonymous Loan

54" x 20<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>"; unbleached tow, twill weave; tie is 5-ply hemp

The grain bag is marked with the farmer's name so that no mistake would be made as to the proper ownership of the bag at the gristmill. This bag was owned by Jacob Yorty, of Lebanon County, and was the ninth bag in his set. The design was stamped on the bag with a carved wood block.

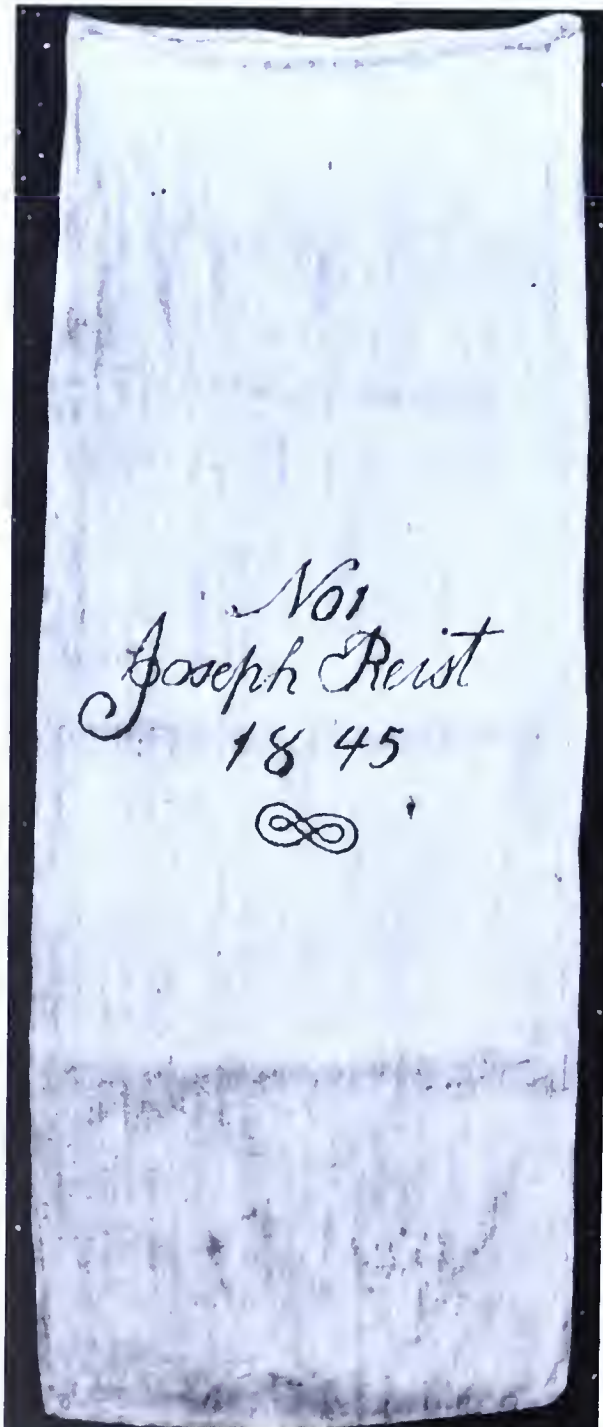


Plate 62. GRAIN BAG; FM9.974

51" x 20"; unbleached tow, twill weave

Joseph Reist marked this two-bushel bag free-hand with black paint.



Plate 61. GRAIN BAG; Anonymous Loan

56" x 19<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>"; unbleached tow

This grain bag, with its two-ply red cross-stitched label, once belonged to John Wolfard, of Montgomery County.

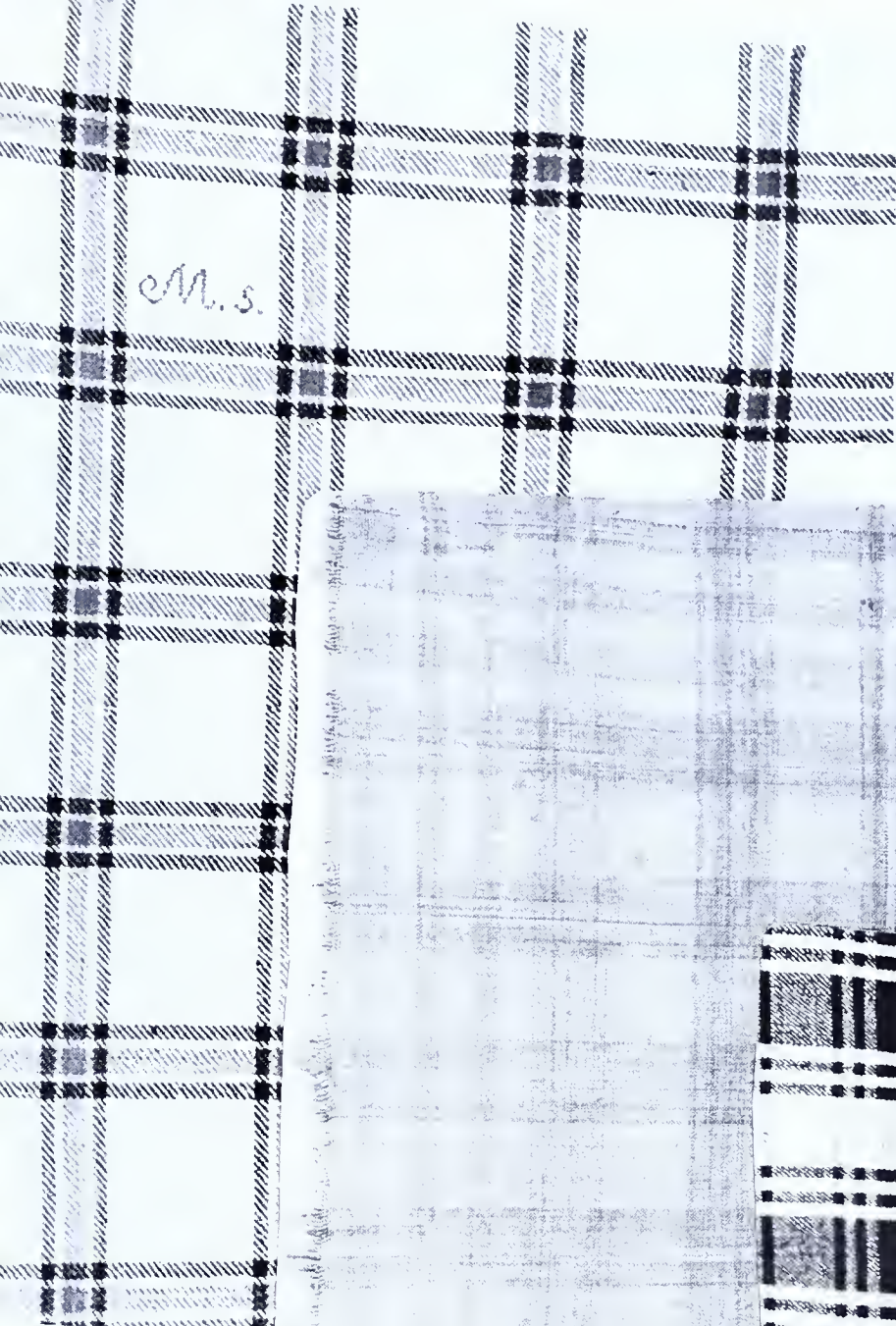


Plate 63. BLANKET; Anonymous Loan

78" x 78"; white, blue and brown wool  
This twill bed blanket was marked in one corner with the initials "MS" in brown wool.



Plate 64. COVERLET; Anonymous Loan

86" x 78"; dull red and green wool  
Over the years many coverlets were worn along the top edge and subsequently cut down to remove the thin areas. That never happened to this plain-weave coverlet.



Plate 65. BLANKET; Anonymous Loan

81" x 64"; white and blue wool  
Blue and white were the most common colors used in blankets. The initials and number "ML 14" appear in one corner of this twill blanket.

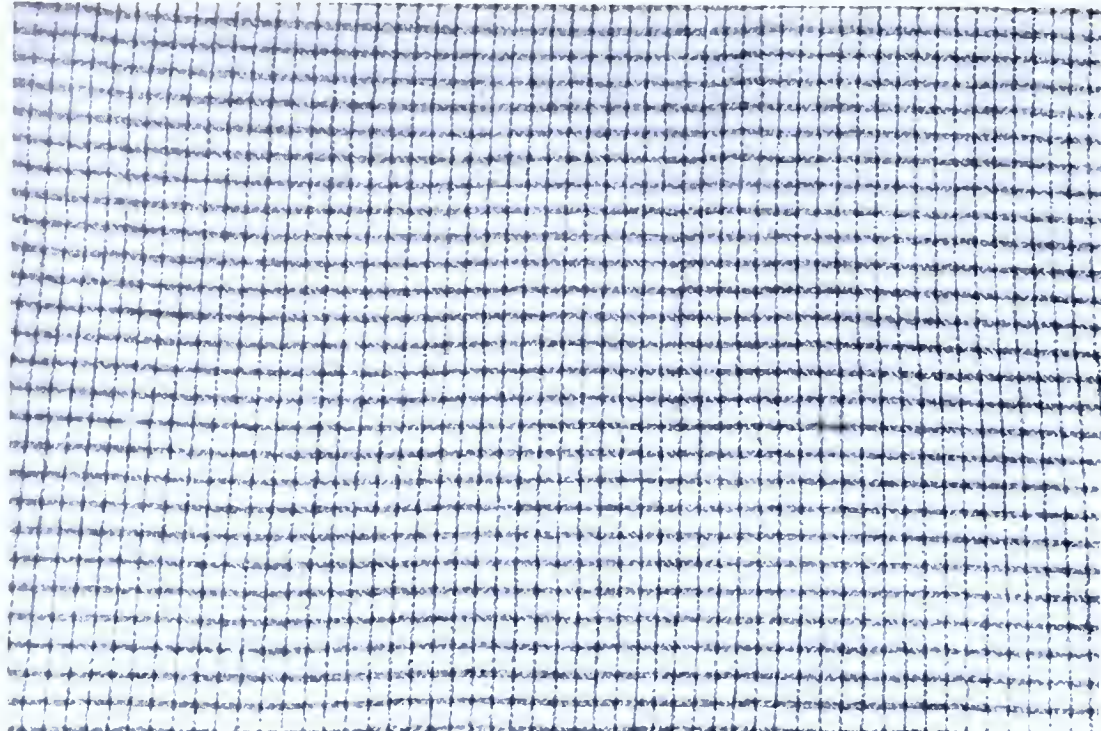


Plate 66. BLANKET; Anonymous Loan

32" x 79"; wool

An all-wool blanket fragment made of red, blue, and yellow-green wool.

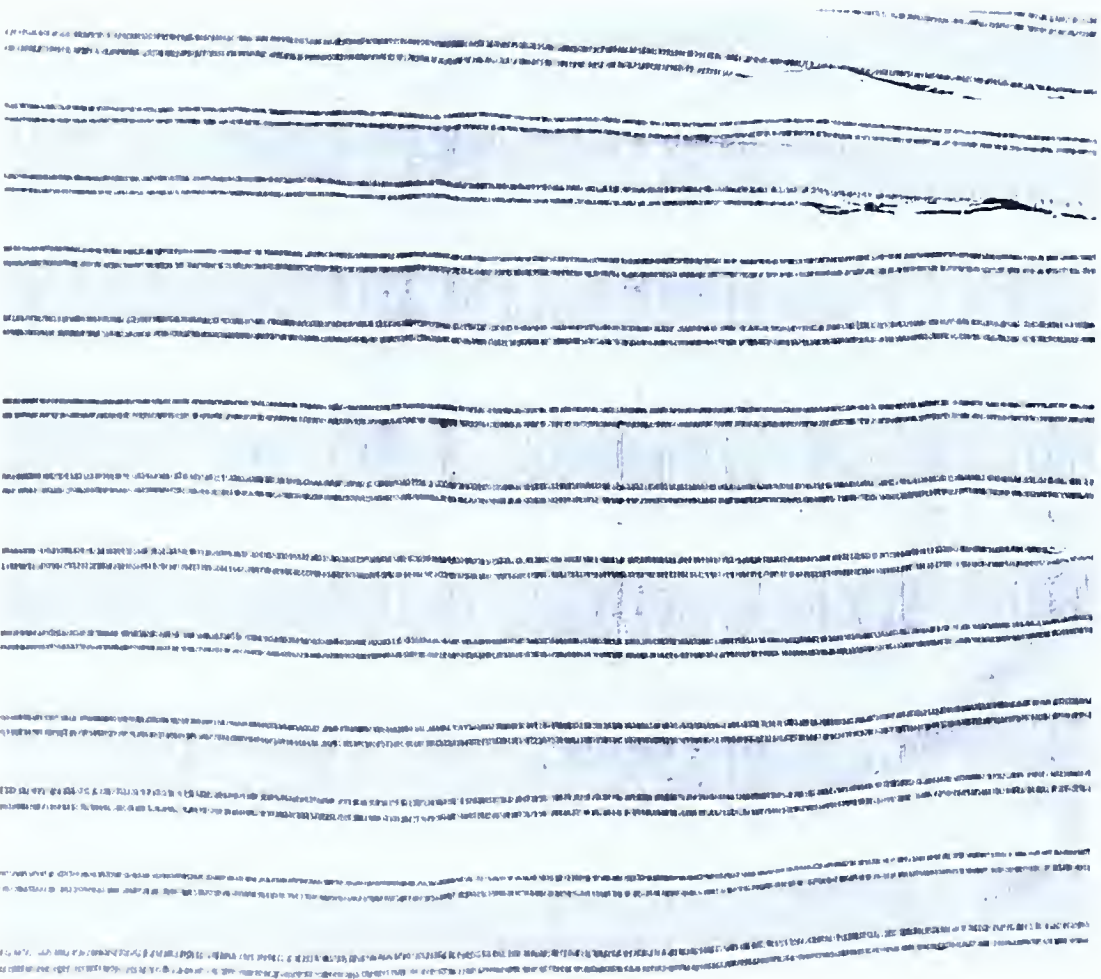


Plate 67. BLANKET; Anonymous Loan

77" x 36"; white cotton; light and dark brown and white wool

Blankets were also made of cotton and wool, such as the fragment shown here. The warp used for this blanket is cotton, while the weft is light brown, dark brown and white wool.

Plate 68. BLANKET; Anonymous Loan

79" x 67"; white wool

There are cross-stitched designs embroidered in red and blue wool across the full width of this homespun wool blanket. The initials and date, "CM 1826," appear in the middle at the center seam-line. There is also a narrow embroidered border along the hemmed edge.



CM 1826



Plate 69. COVERLET; Anonymous Loan  
84" x 77"; blue and reddish-brown wool

Single-ply wool was used to make coverlets in the early period and here the homespun twist may be seen in the irregular fringe.

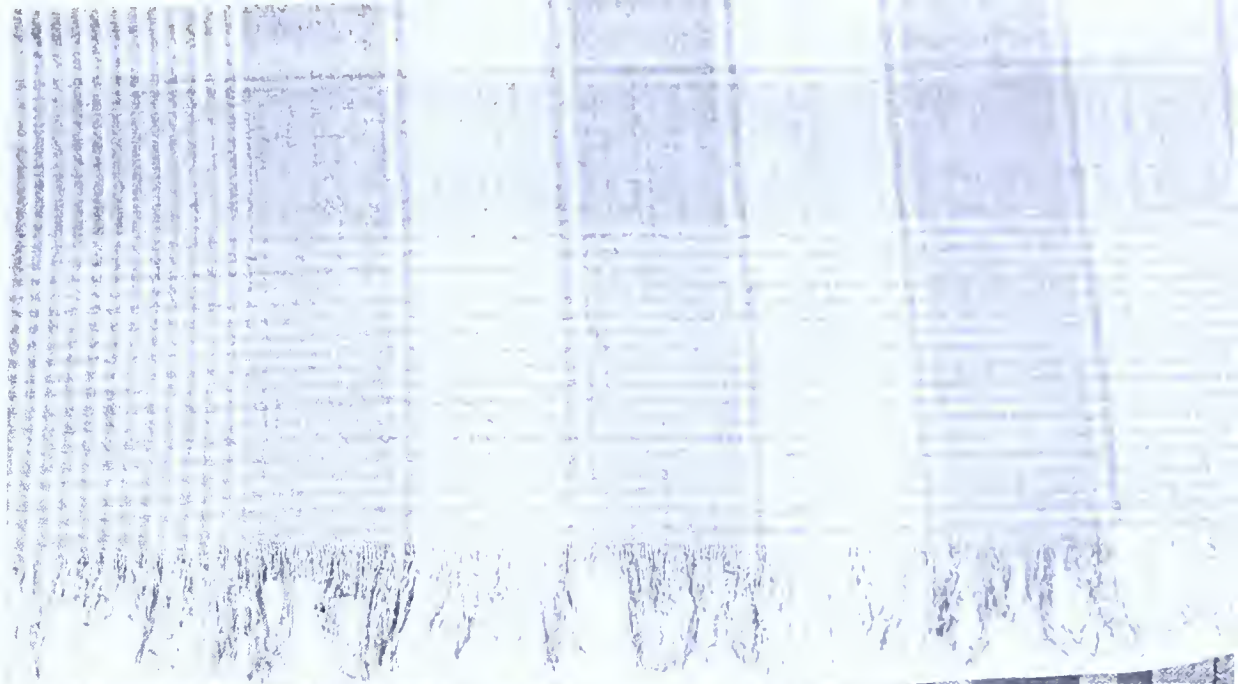


Plate 70. COVERLET; Anonymous Loan  
78" x 79"; blue and reddish-brown wool

Many weavers wove no pattern-weave cloth, but did weave coverlets of this type.

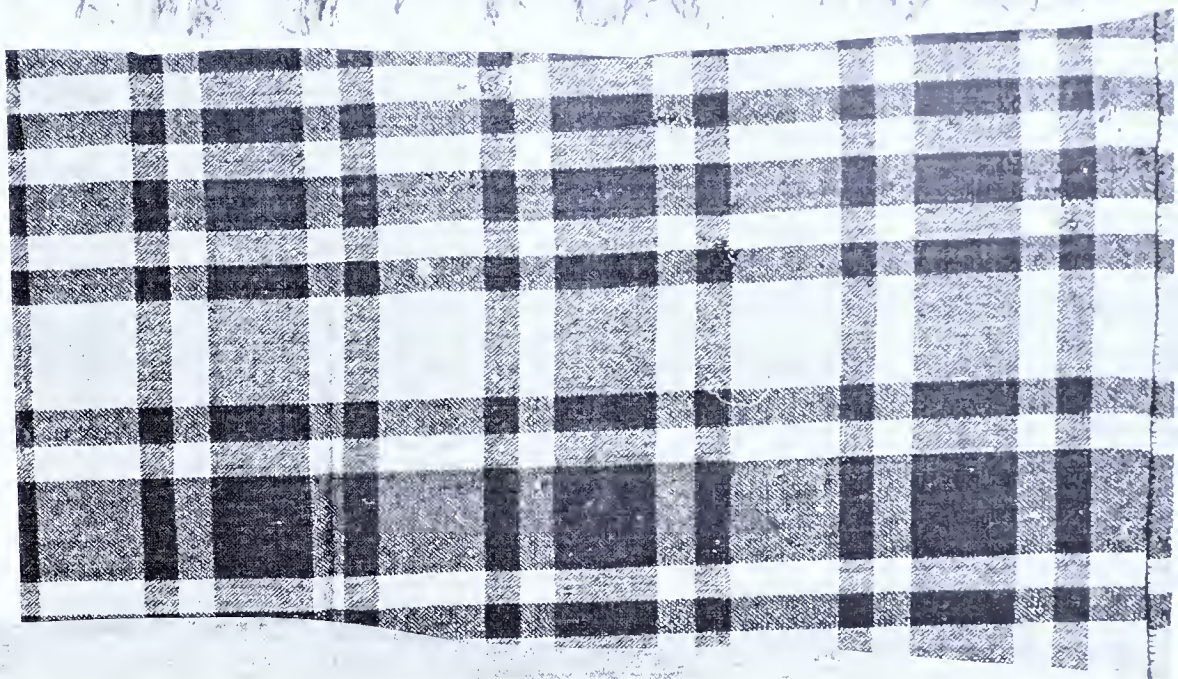


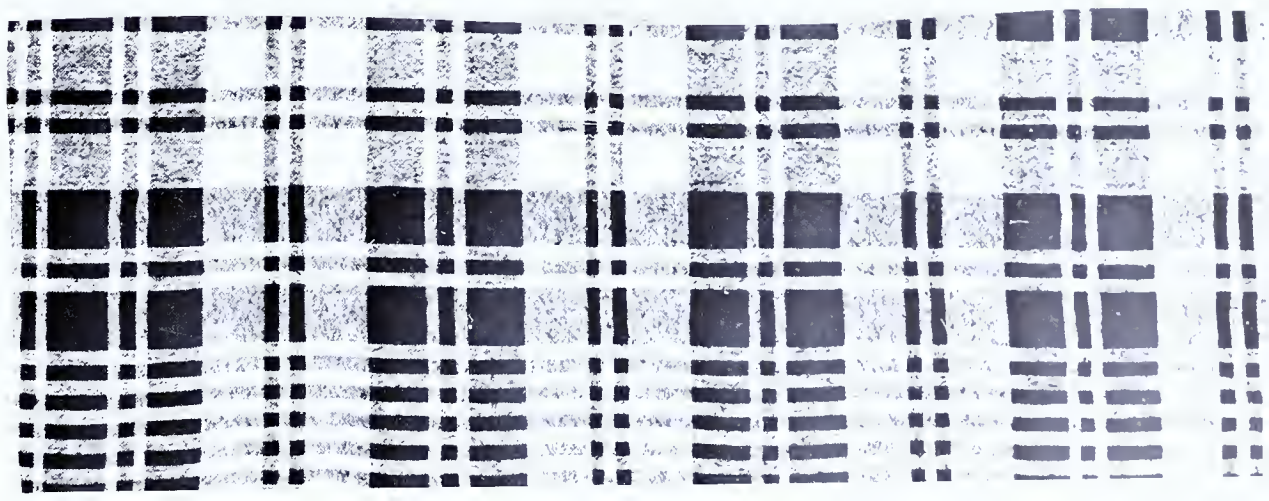
Plate 71. BLANKET; Anonymous Loan  
72" x 67"; blue and yellow wool

Blankets were seldom part of the Pennsylvania German household, but occasionally one or two blankets are listed in estate inventories.



Plate 72. COVERLET; Anonymous Loan  
86" x 78"; blue wool and white cotton

Many times a plain-weave "blanket" is found with a border around three sides. Such "blankets" were most probably used as and called coverlets by their makers and original owners. The initials "IF" appear on this coverlet in blue linen cross-stitch.



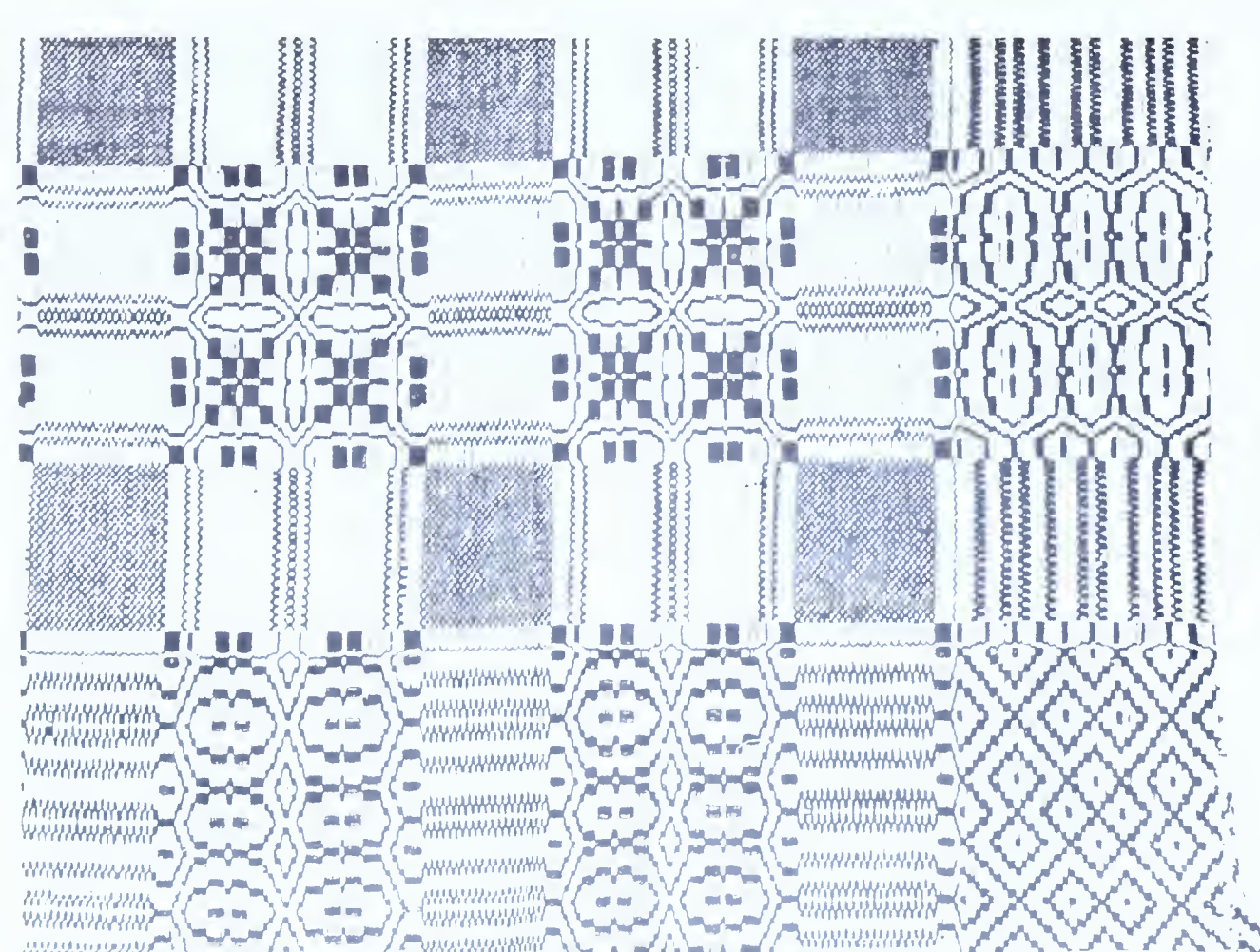


Plate 73. COVERLET;  
FM65.17

94" x 67"; blue wool and white  
cotton

The four-harness overshot weave  
was used by some Pennsylvania  
German weavers; however, weavers  
working in the British Isles tradition  
used the four-harness weave more  
frequently.

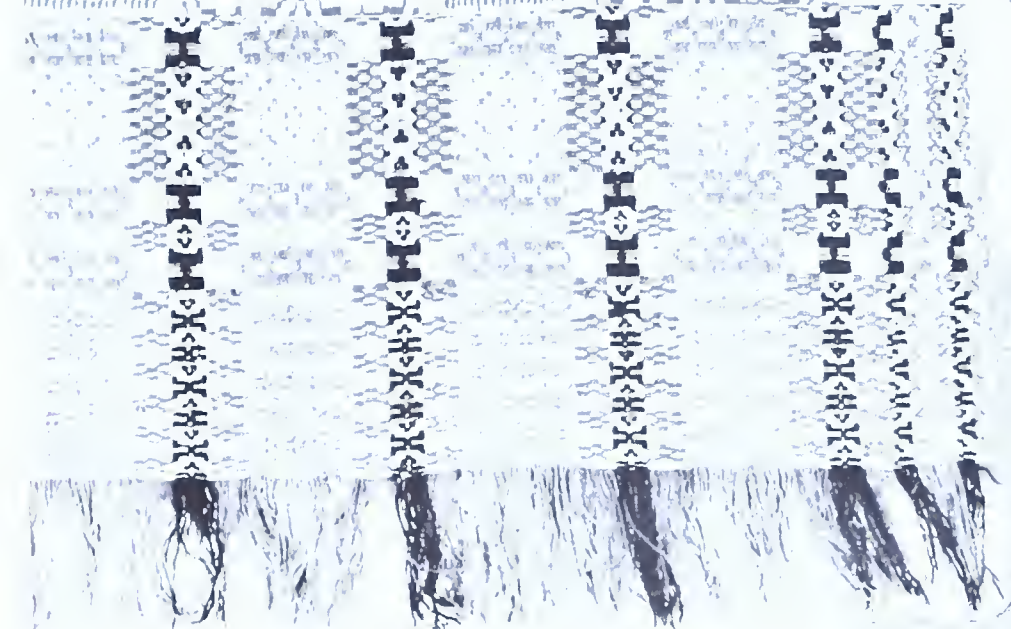


Plate 74. COVERLET; Anonymous  
Loan

36¾" plus fringe x 33½"; red, dark  
blue, and light blue wool; white cotton  
This small coverlet, probably used on a rock-  
ing cradle, was woven in a six-harness over-  
shot pattern.



Plate 75. COVERLET; FM66.54.1

90" x 69"; red wool and natural cotton  
The "summer and winter weave" of this  
coverlet is seldom found in the Pennsylvania  
German areas, but occasionally a "summer  
and winter" coverlet, probably woven by a  
non-German, will turn up.

Plate 76. COVERLET DETAIL; Anonymous Loan

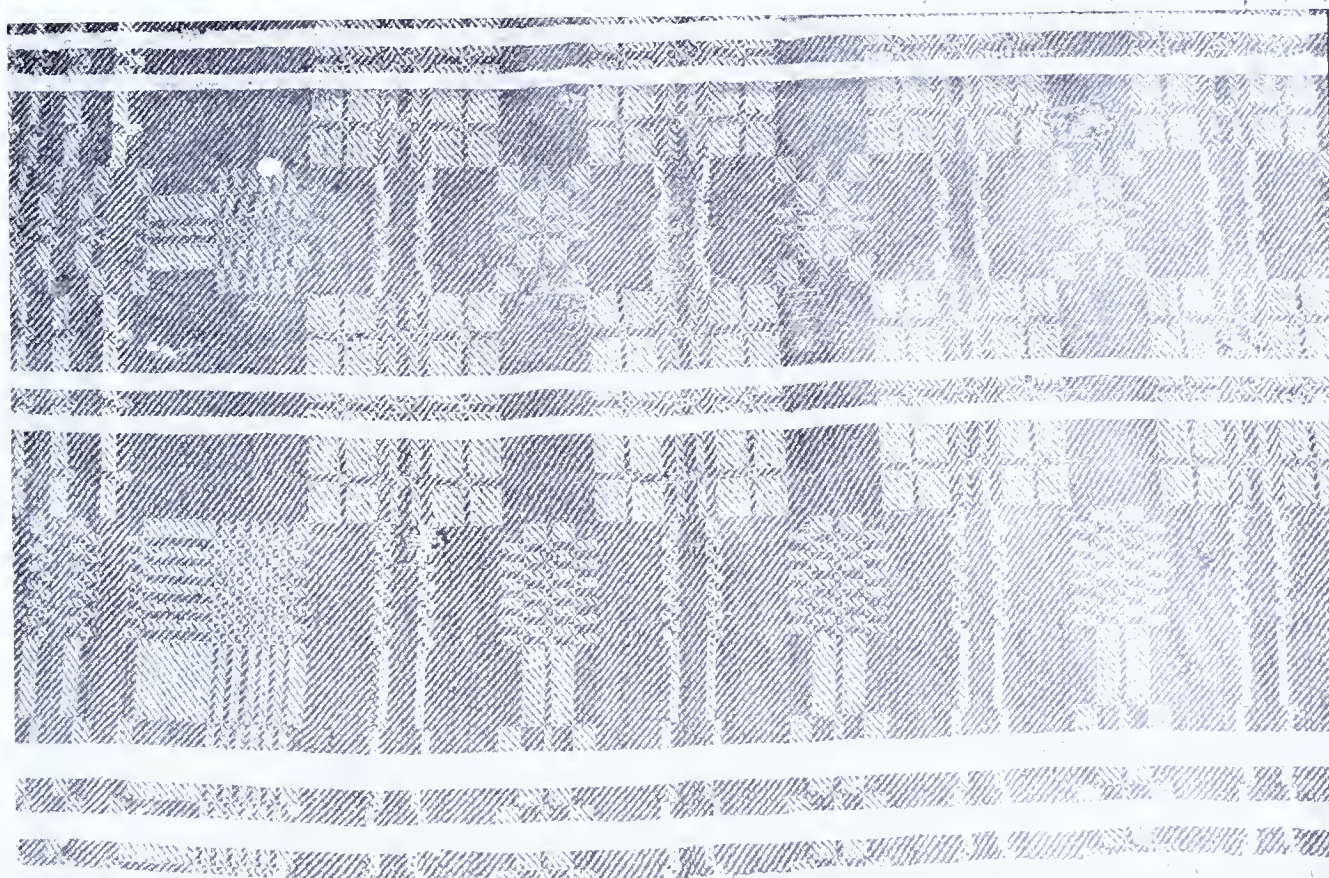
99½" x 88"; one- and two-ply bleached linen and tow yarn

Old weavers' account books mention the making of "tow coverlets," which may have been either plain weave or the four-harness overshot weave as this one. The warp and the pattern threads are two-ply tow, but the tabby thread is single-ply linen. Because of its light weight and white color, it would be safe to assume that this coverlet was used in the summer rather than winter.

Plate 77. COVERLET; Anonymous Loan

84" x 80"; red, green, black and gray wool, 2 ply

This coverlet is typical of the sixteen-harness double-faced twill coverlets woven by the Pennsylvania weavers and called "single coverlets."



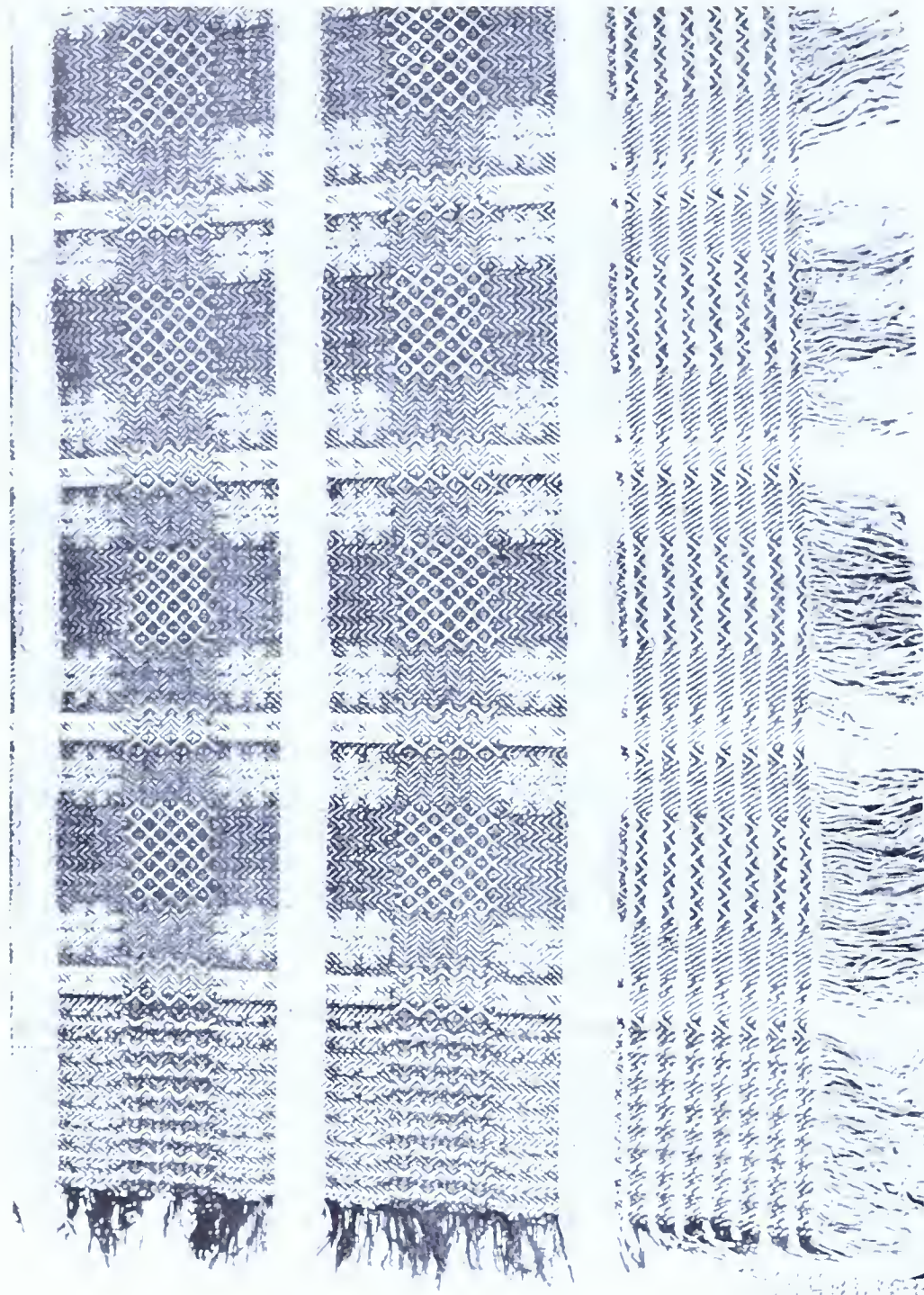


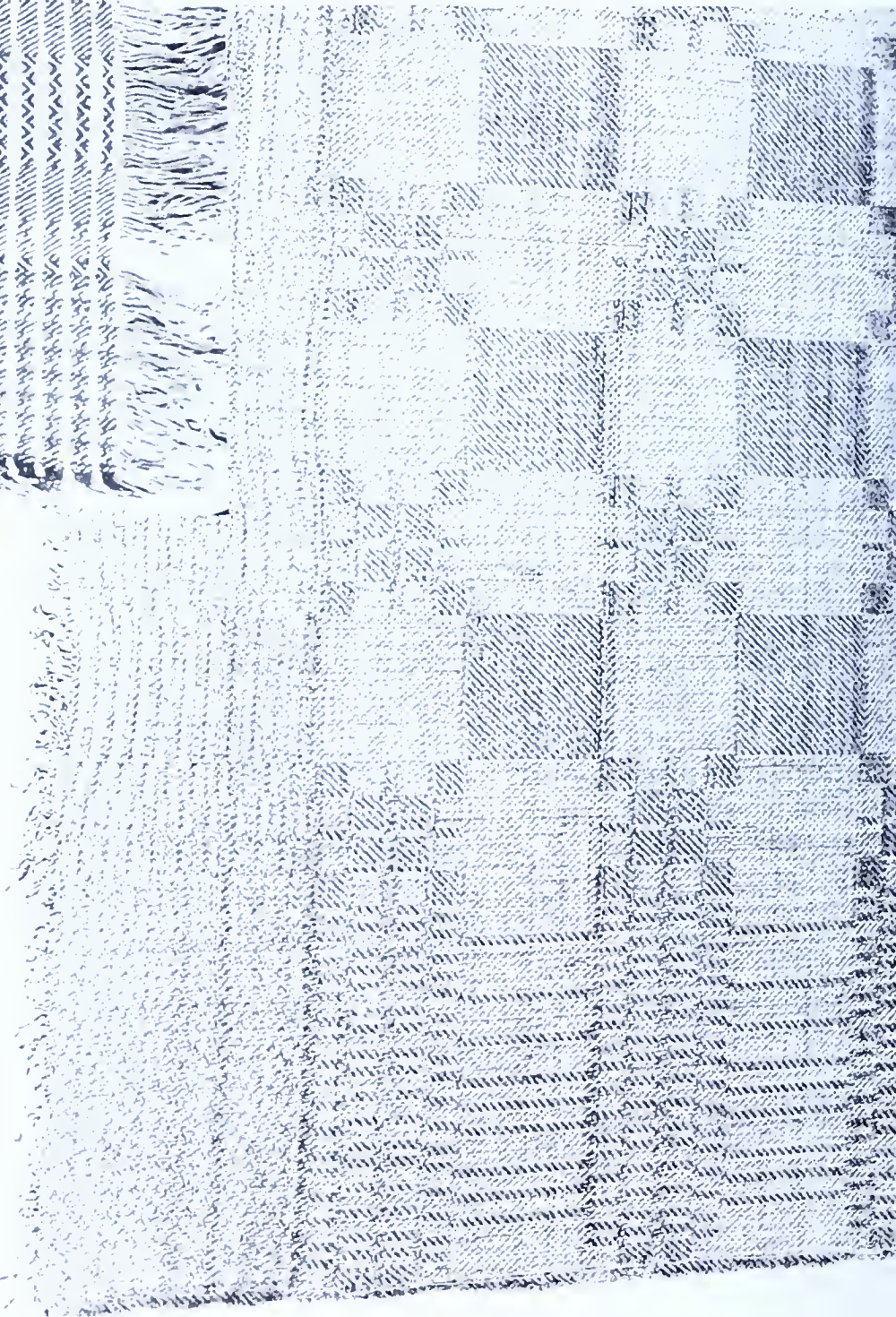
Plate 78. COVERLET; Anonymous Loan

82" x 72"; light blue, dark blue, green and red wool; white cotton; all yarns are 2-ply

The pattern books which the early weavers kept show quite a number of patterns of the type shown in this sixteen-harness coverlet, and label them *gebrochene hin-und-wieder*.

Plate 79. COVERLET; FM24.840  
78" x 82"; 2-ply blue cotton warp and 2-ply reddish-brown wool

The twelve-harness double-faced twill construction of this coverlet is frequently encountered in various patterns on old towels, tablecloths and coverlets in Pennsylvania.



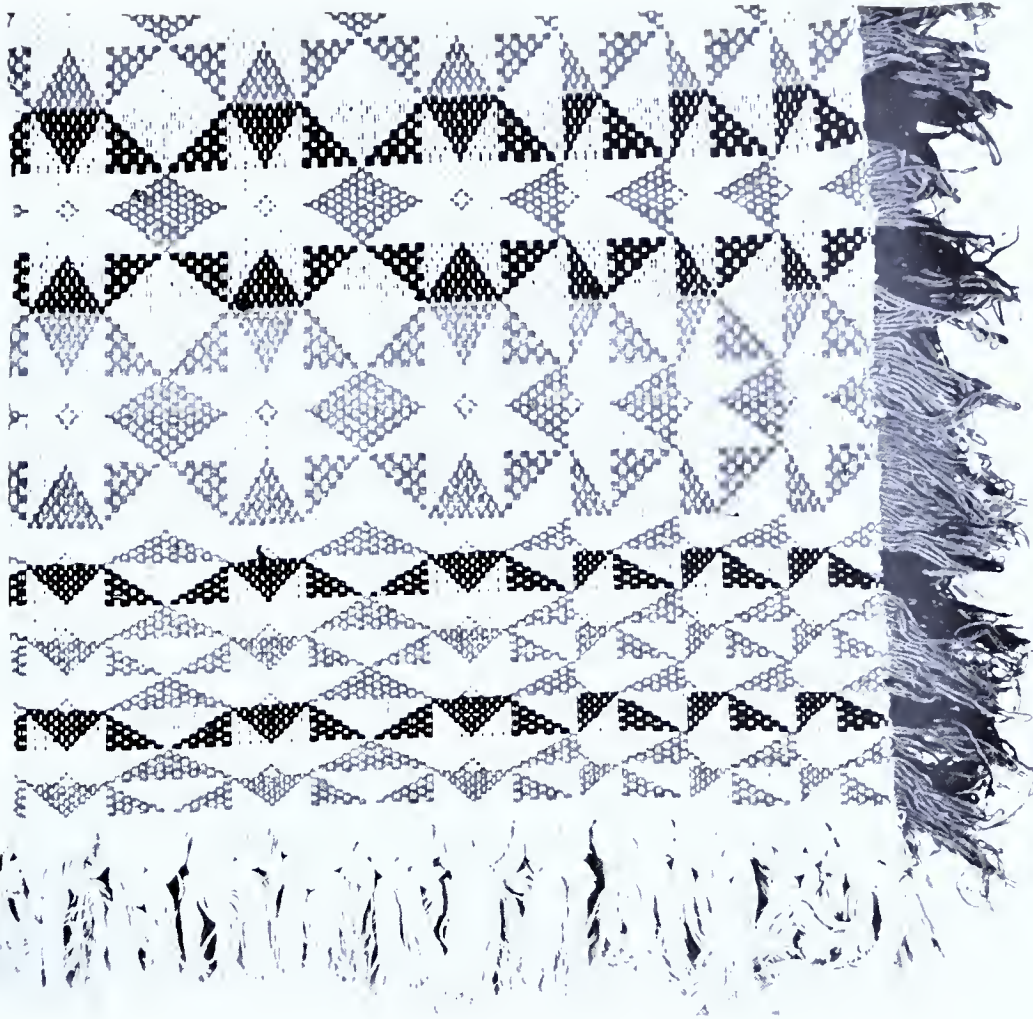


Plate 80. COVERLET; FM8.304  
86" x 83"; light blue, dark blue and  
red wool; white cotton

Many of the coverlet weavers in early Pennsylvania were blue and red dyers as well, and for that reason many of the woolen yarns in the old coverlets are a combination of light and dark blue and red. The weave in this coverlet has been variously described in the past as "star and diamond" and "multiple harness," but it is also an overshot construction. This eighteen-harness weave shows all the components of overshot—pattern shot, half-tones and tabby.

Plate 81. COVERLET; FM24.841  
82" x 74"; light blue, dark blue, red-  
dish brown wool, 2 ply; white cotton,  
2 ply

The old Pennsylvania German weavers referred to this sixteen-harness twill weave as *hin-und-wieder* or *beindt werk* (point work).

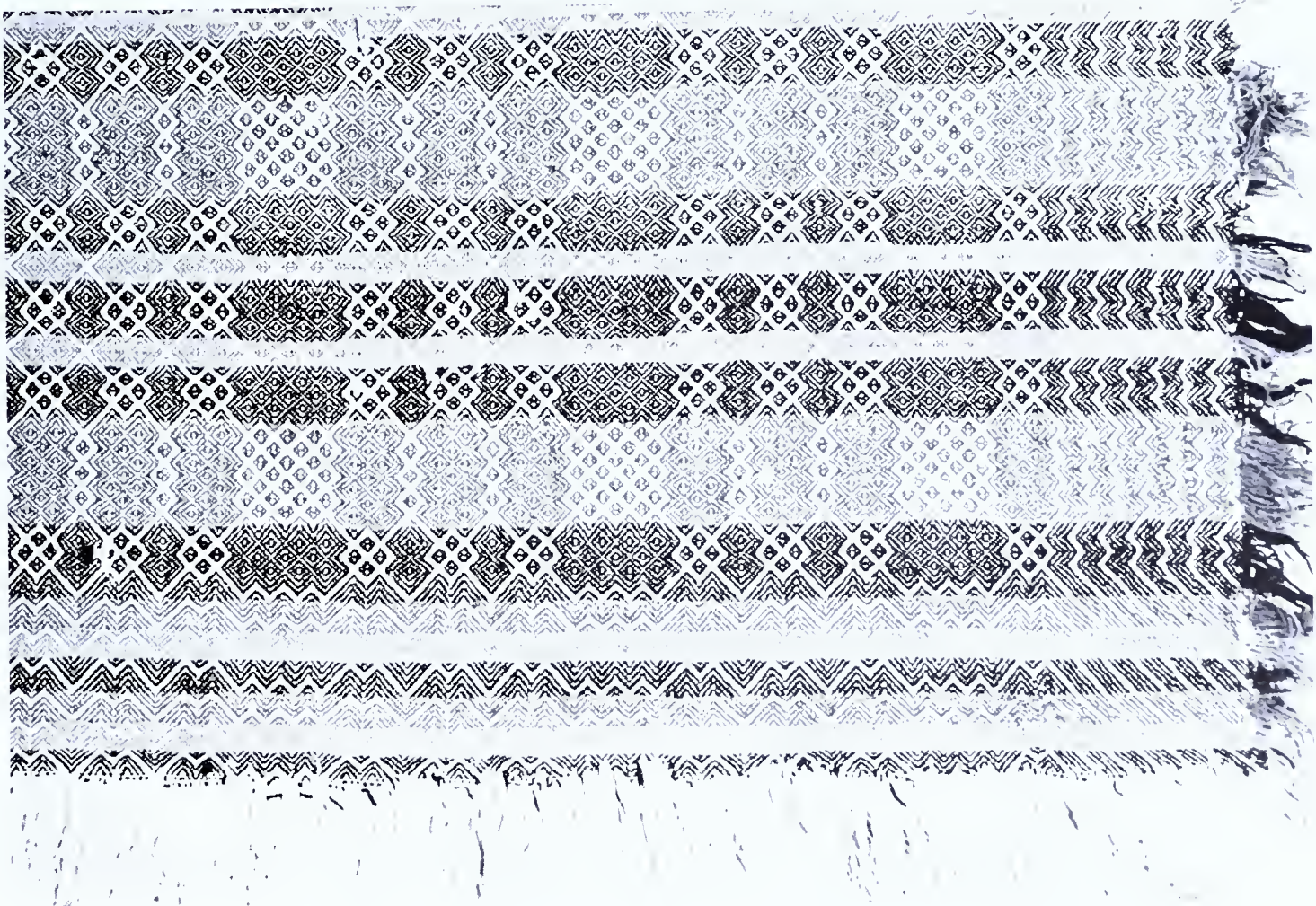




Plate 82. COVERLET; Anonymous Loan

93½" x 63" plus fringe; reddish brown, light green, dark blue wool, 2 ply; white cotton

Multiple harness coverlets like this one are found occasionally in the Pennsylvania German area. The weave is constructed of a cotton warp and a wool pattern weft, with a cotton tabby to tie the pattern yarns.

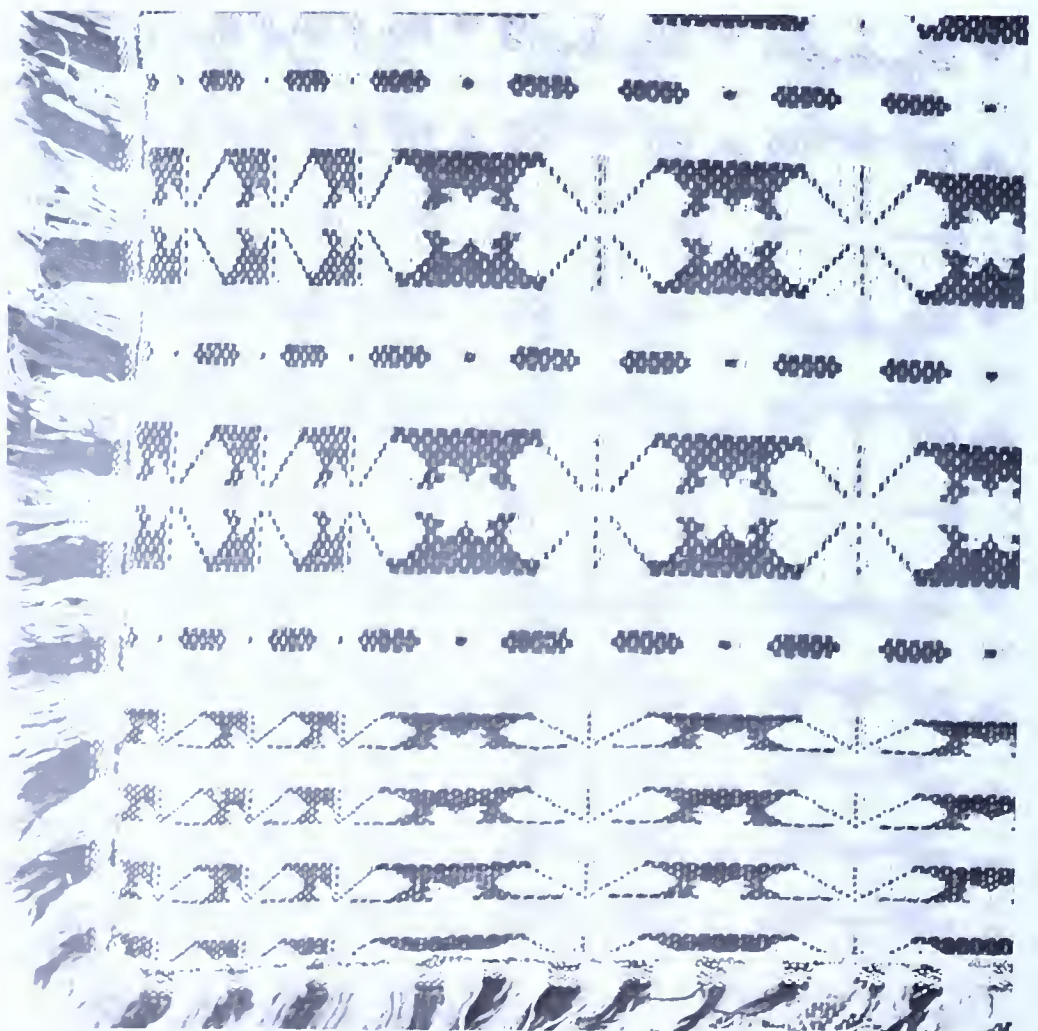


Plate 83. COVERLET; Anonymous Loan

81" x 68"; red and yellow wool, white cotton, all 2-ply yarns

The eight-pointed star and the eight-petaled flower are familiar designs on the old Pennsylvania coverlets. The coverlet has blue wool cross-stitch "CR" initials on it.

Plate 84. COVERLET; Anonymous  
Loan

85" x 77"; dark blue wool, white cotton, all yarns 2 ply

The pattern on this double-cloth coverlet required a forty-harness loom, and is one of the most elaborate patterns found on a Pennsylvania non-Jacquard coverlet. The coverlet comes from the city of Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

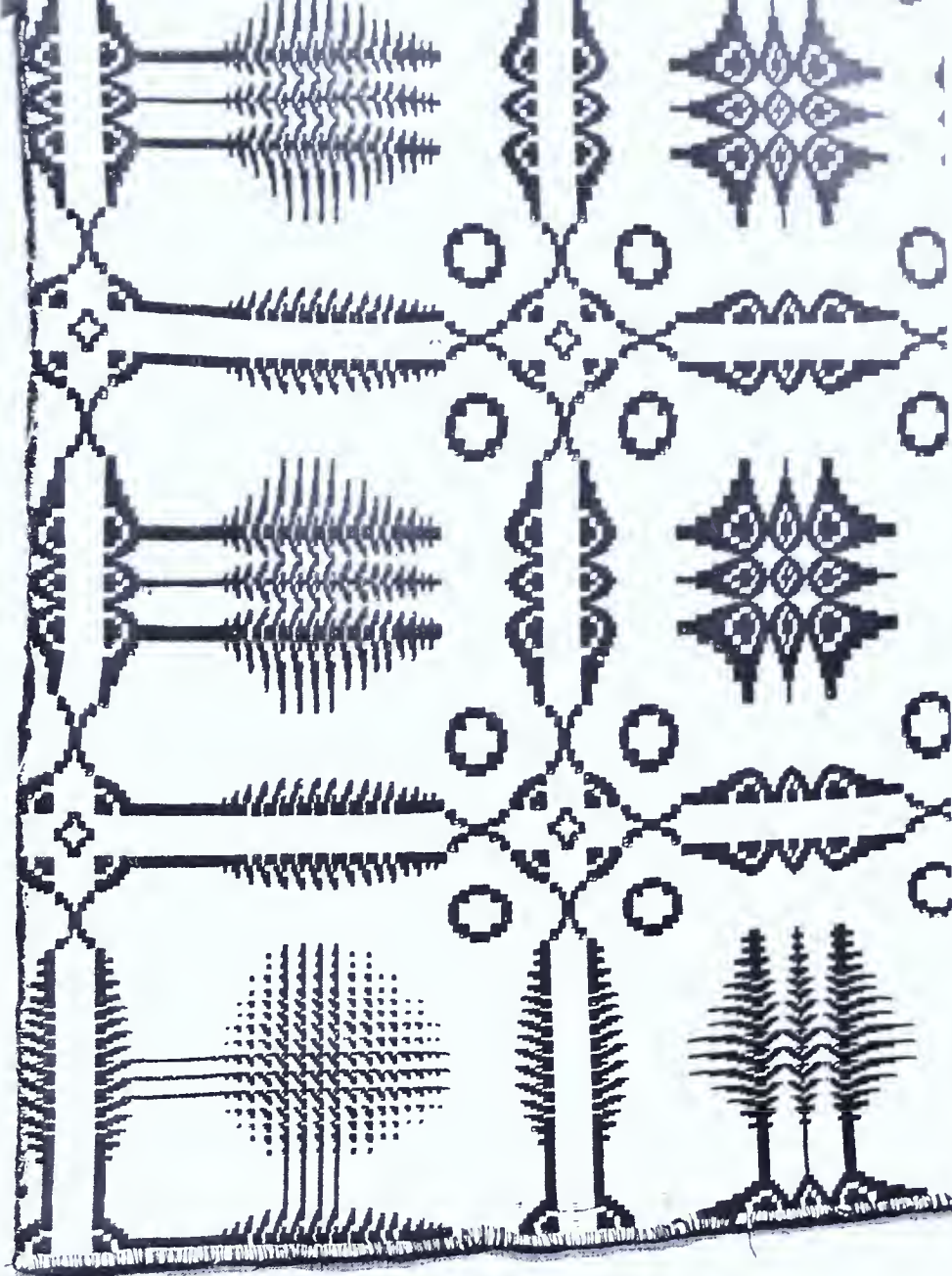
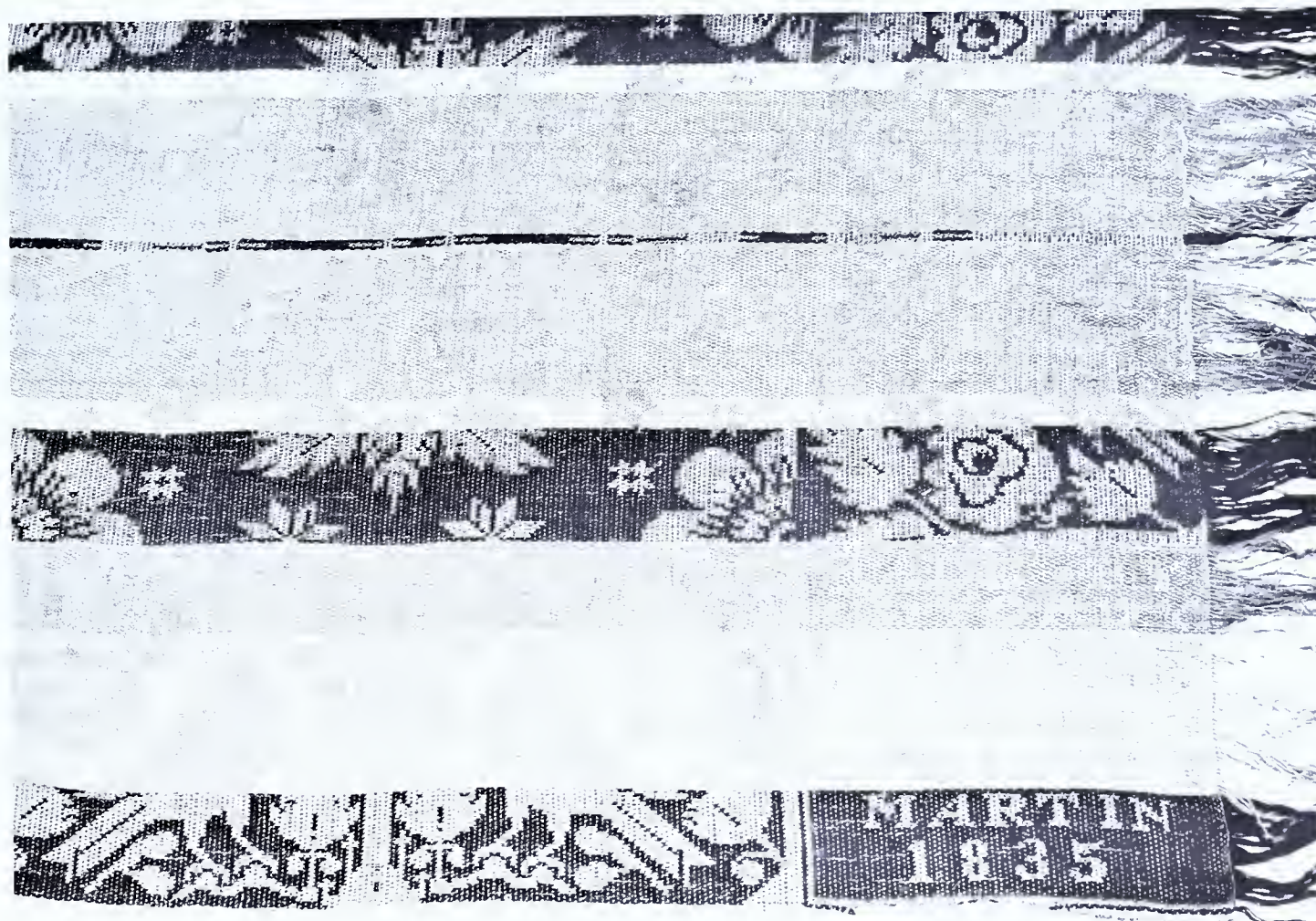


Plate 85. COVERLET; FM74.4.27

96" x 87½"; dark blue, light green and reddish-brown wool; light blue linen, 2 ply

The Jacquard coverlet, now so popular among collectors, was the last type of home-spun coverlet woven for the farmers of nineteenth-century Pennsylvania. "Made by C. Yordy Conestoga Township [Lancaster County] for Catherine Martin 1835."



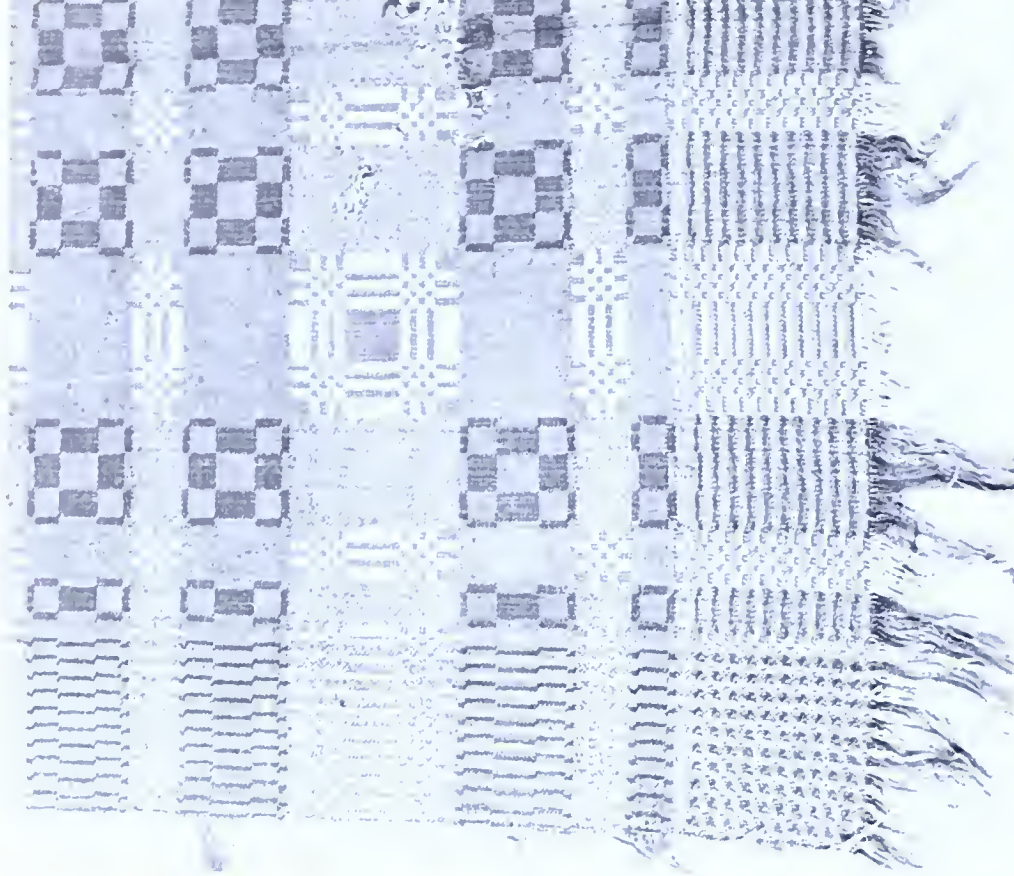


Plate 86. COVERLET; Anonymous Loan

90½" x 80"; light green, red and white wool, 2 ply.

Coverlets were treasured items in the household from the time they were new down to the present day and were used by several generations. Some coverlets were kept and valued even though worn and moth damaged, as is this sixteen-harness double-cloth example. Many a coverlet was cut apart at its center seam and one-half given to a claiming heir and the other half to another.

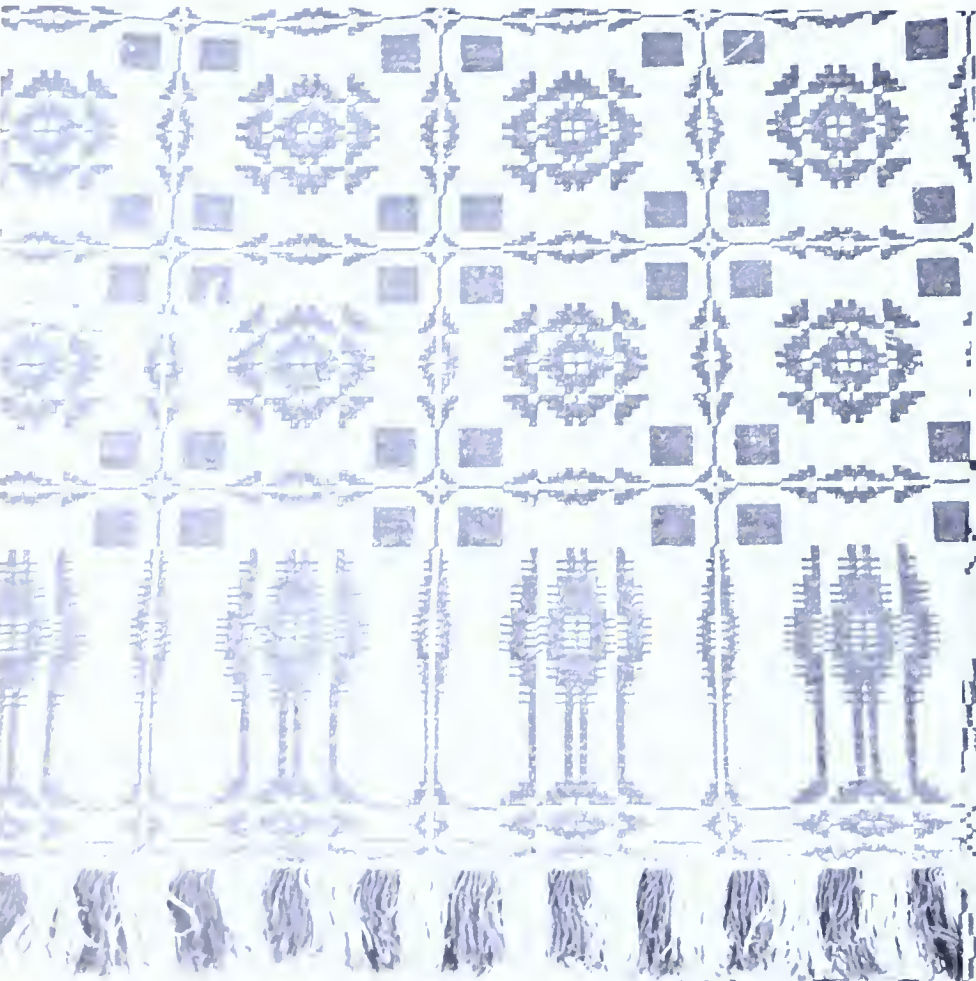


Plate 87. COVERLET; Anonymous Loan

90" x 76"; red wool, white cotton; all yarn 2 ply.

Most coverlets had fringe of some sort on at least one side; many had fringe on three sides. The fringe was at times an extension of the warp and weft yarns. The fringe on this double-cloth coverlet was woven separately and applied to three sides with two-ply linen thread. The center seams on the hand-loomed coverlets were usually an overcast stitch in either linen or wool, dyed one of the colors in the coverlet.

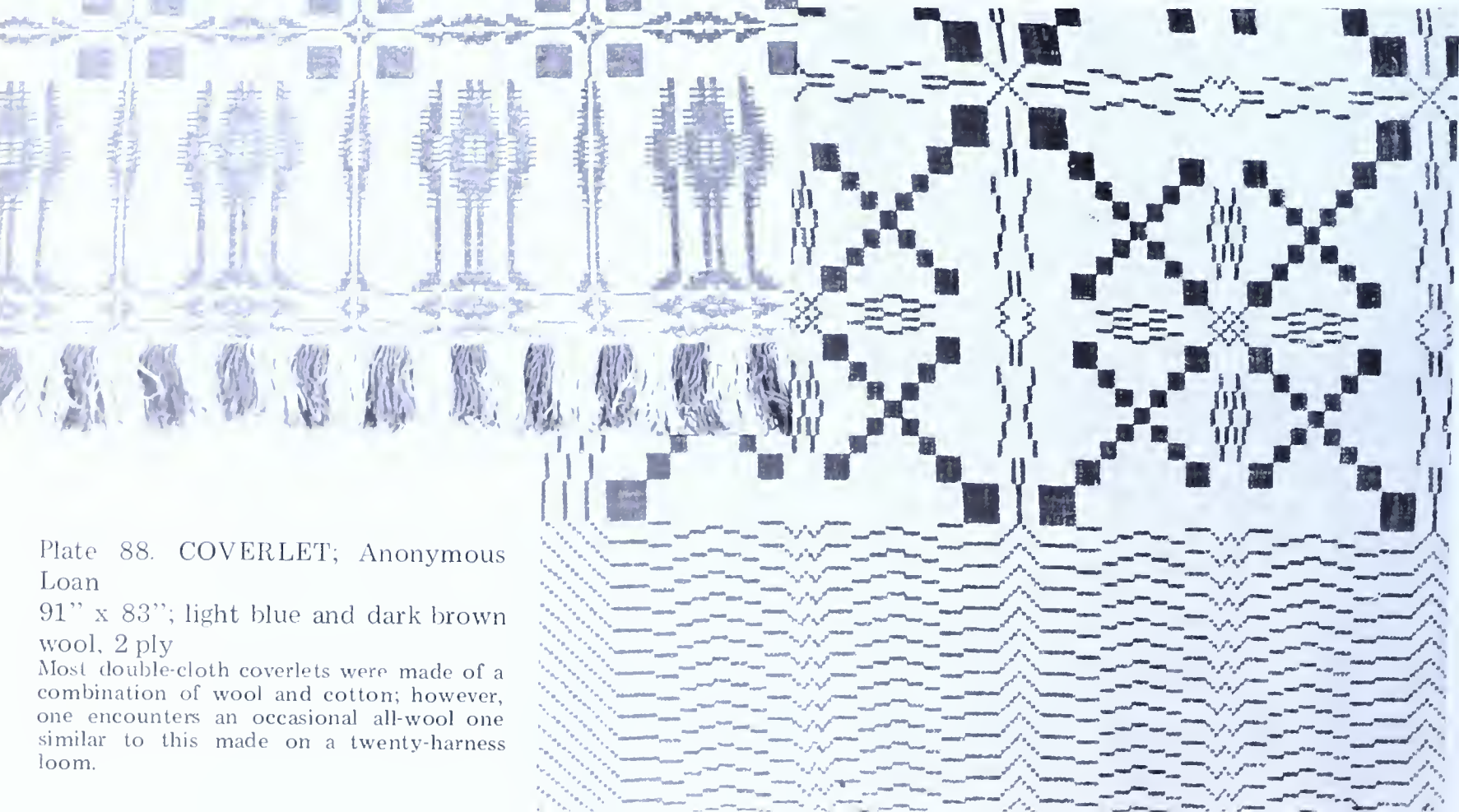


Plate 88. COVERLET; Anonymous Loan

91" x 83"; light blue and dark brown wool, 2 ply

Most double-cloth coverlets were made of a combination of wool and cotton; however, one encounters an occasional all-wool one similar to this made on a twenty-harness loom.



Plate 89. TABLECLOTH DETAIL;  
Anonymous Loan

64" x 40<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>"; bleached linen

This single-loom-width tablecloth marked "1791 MH" in red cotton and woven in the "birdseye" pattern is typical of the table linen in rural Pennsylvania.

Plate 90. TABLECLOTH; Anonymous  
Loan

342" x 34"; unbleached linen

Tablecloths were used on the table at nearly every meal, so when a barn raising, a wedding or a funeral meal was set out a tablecloth was required. Those occasions were probably served by this twenty-eight and one-half-foot-long four-harness tablecloth. It is hemmed on both ends and has the monogram "WEF" at one end in brown silk.

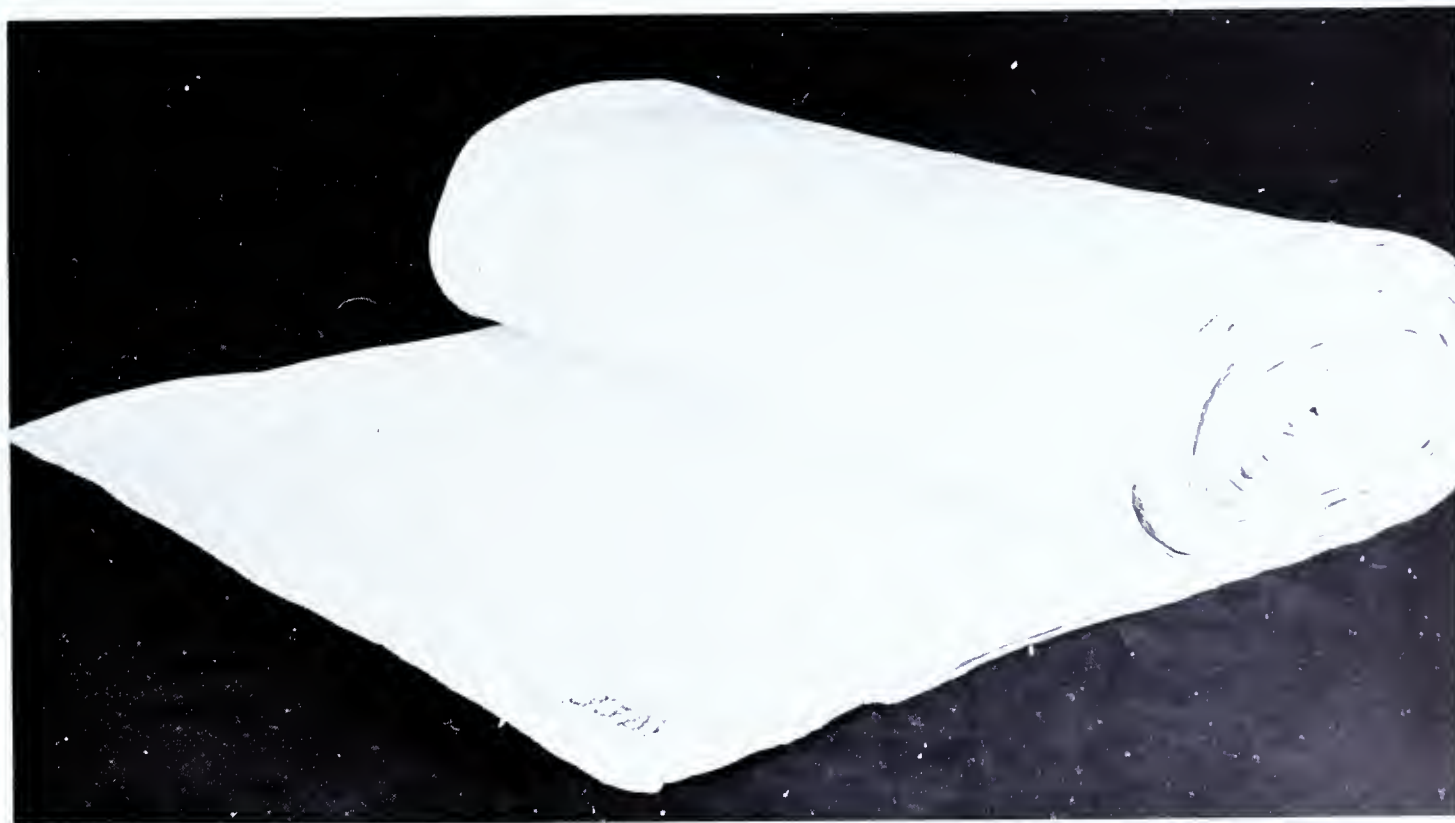




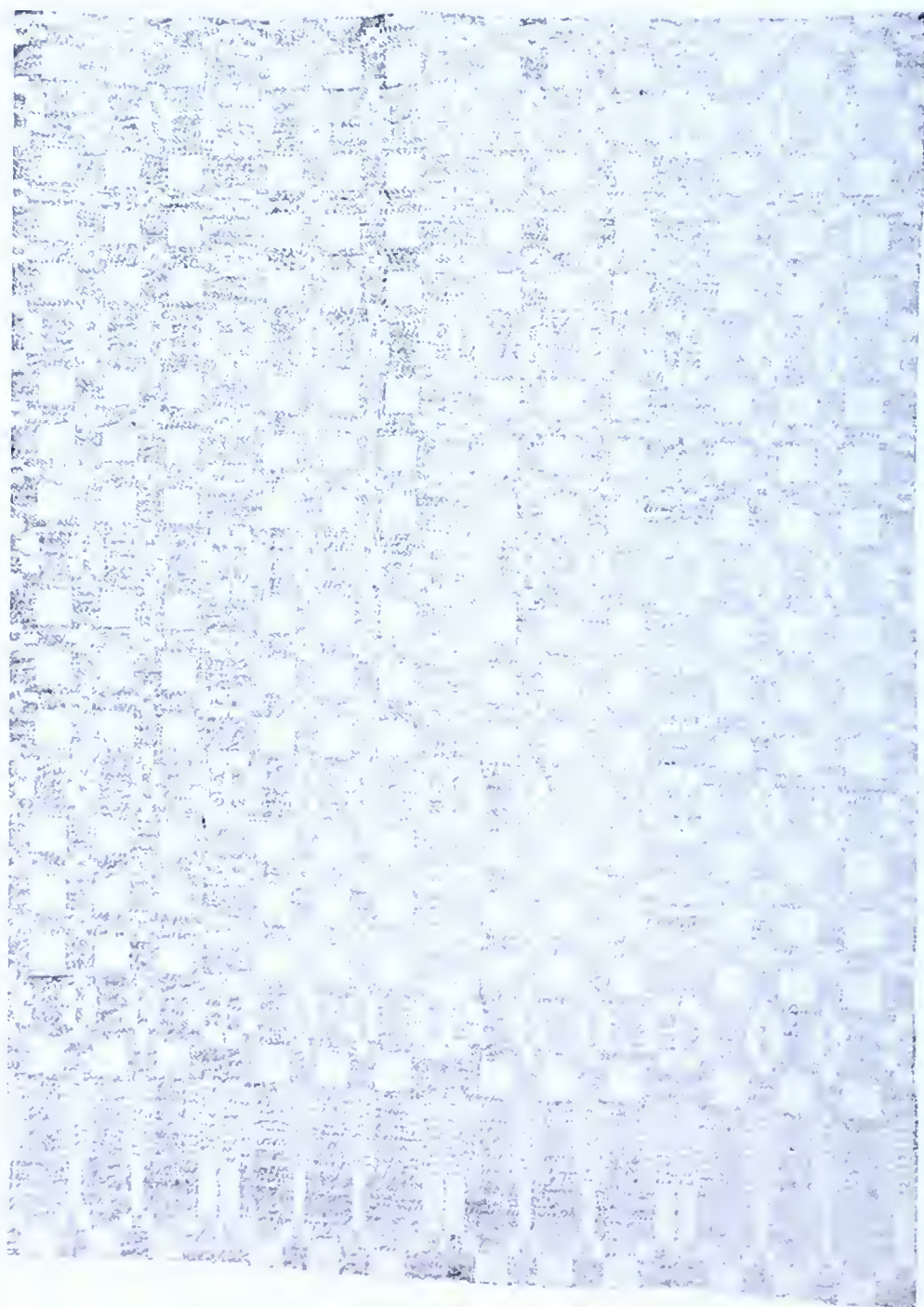
Plate 91. TABLECLOTH; Anonymous Loan

68" x 40"; brown and unbleached tow  
The everyday tablecloth of nineteenth-century Pennsylvania farmhouses was usually a single loom width and of tow stripe fringed on both ends. It usually covered only the top of the table and hung down a few inches at the end.

Plate 92. TABLECLOTH FABRIC; Anonymous Loan

130" x 27¼"; unbleached linen warp, unbleached cotton weft

This piece of fabric is just as it came from the weaver and has never been made into the intended tablecloth. At the bottom is the familiar "pine tree" border frequently found on twelve-harness, double-faced twills.



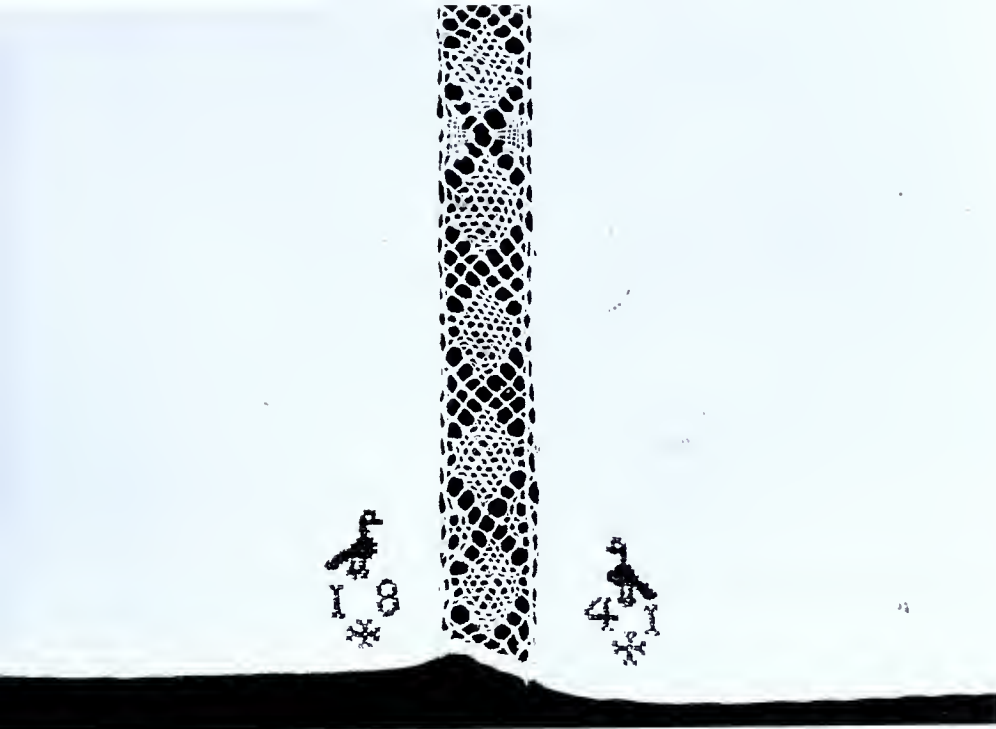


Plate 93. TABLECLOTH DETAIL;  
Anonymous Loan  
66" x 55"; bleached linen warp, white  
cotton weft

As furniture styles changed and the old  
stretcher-base or saw-buck table was aban-  
doned for the more modern gate-leg drop-  
leaf table, the tablecloth changed also. It be-  
came fashionable to use a double-loom-  
width tablecloth to cover the wider table.  
The center seam was formed by using a num-  
ber of stitches, from the overcast butt seam  
to the feather stitch to the homespun bobbin  
lace, on this 1841 eight-harness tablecloth.  
The birds and date in red cotton are em-  
broidered in cross-stitch.



Plate 94. TABLECLOTH DETAIL;  
Anonymous Loan

80" x 68"; bleached linen

The tablecloth exemplified the skills of the  
spinner and weaver, and here both are shown  
at their best. This twenty-harness *gebilds*—  
"damask"—tablecloth is double width, joined  
with a feather-stitch seam in the center. It has  
red cotton cross-stitch initials "FAS" and is  
self-fringed on both sides.

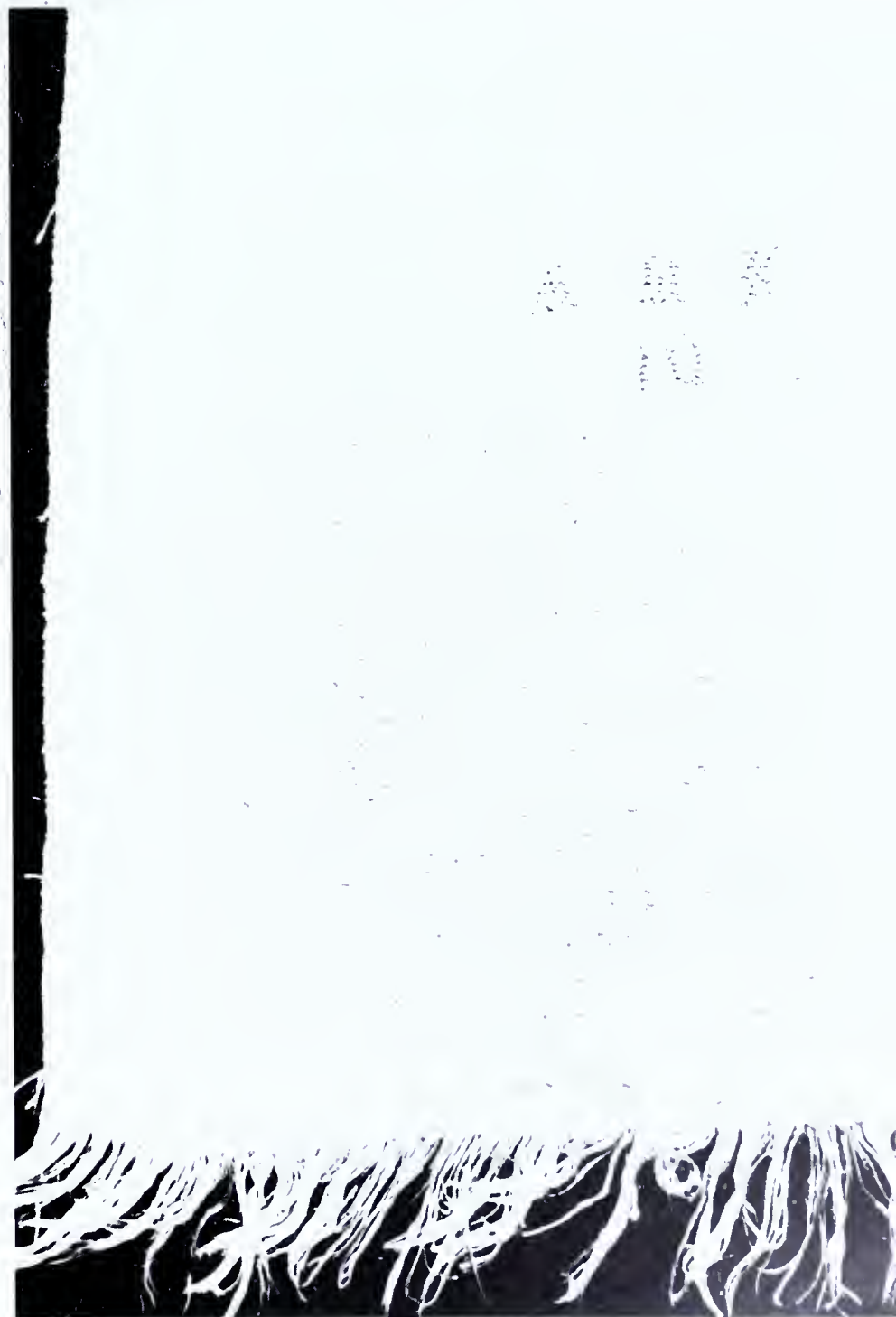


Plate 95. TABLECLOTH; FM12.603

66" x 51" plus fringe; bleached linen

Many housewives marked their bed and table  
linen with their initials and a number to keep  
track of ownership and the proper use rota-  
tion. The red cotton marks are "AMK 10."

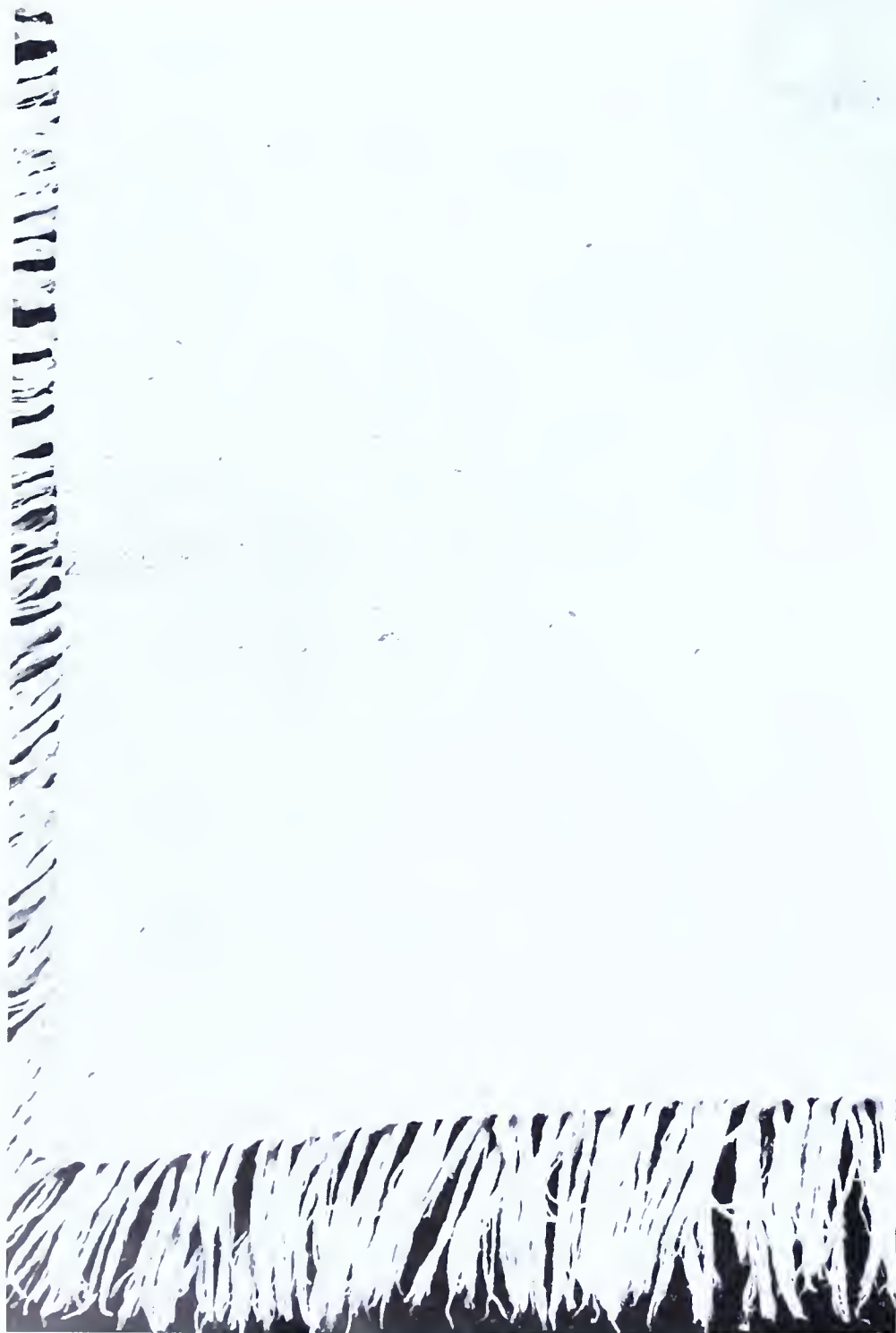
Plate 96. TABLECLOTH; FM24.495  
52" x 31"; unbleached linen, un-  
bleached cotton

This Jacquard tablecloth was made with a  
border on one long side and the two short  
sides, and was probably designed to fit an  
empire side table. It was "Made by C. Yordy  
Willow Street in Lancaster County 1840."



Plate 97. TABLECLOTH; FM12.608  
66" x 62"; bleached linen

This twenty-four-harness *gesteintem* double-  
faced twill tablecloth with fringe on four  
sides is a good example of fine homespun  
linen. It is marked in red cotton cross-stitch  
with "SF."



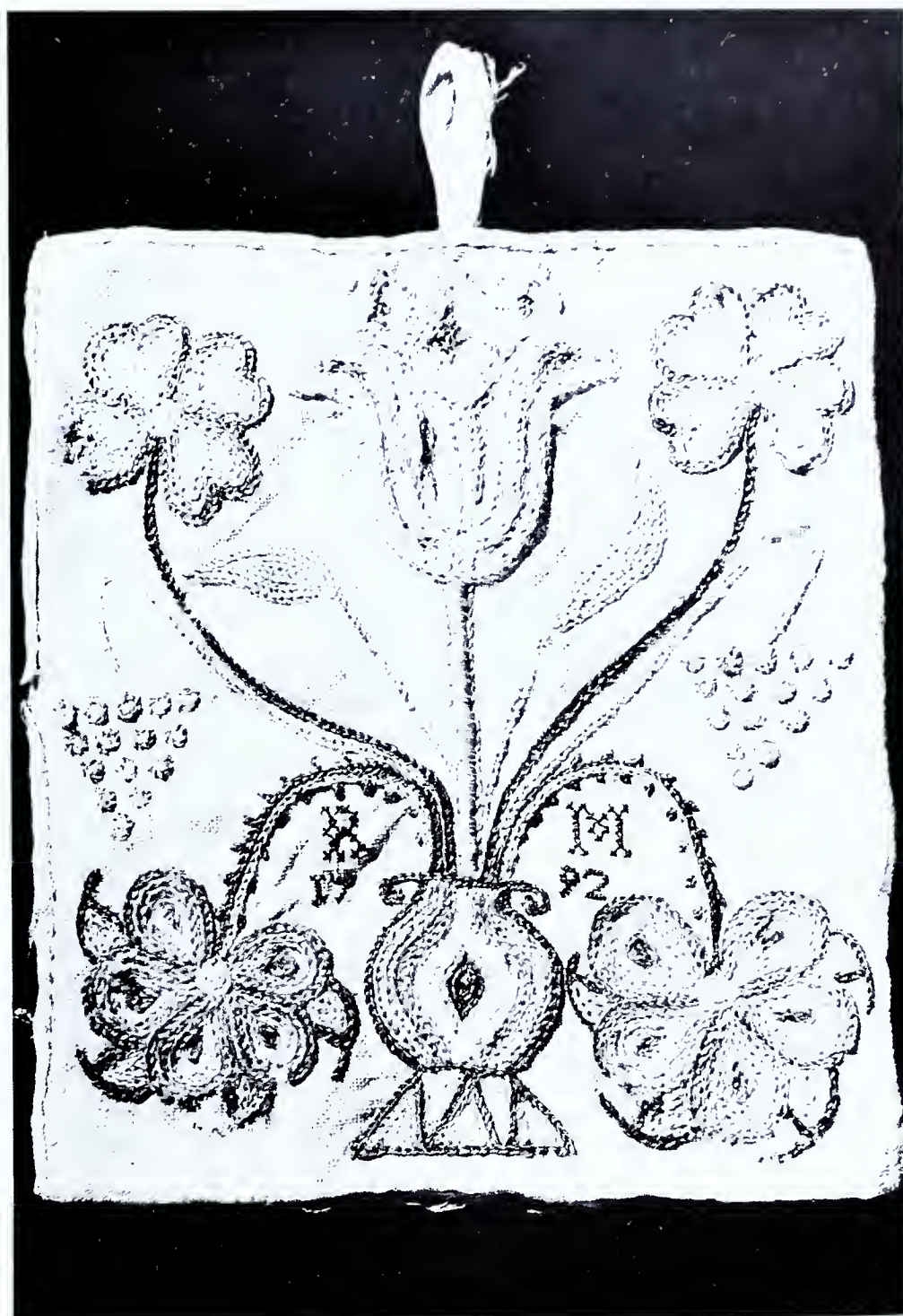


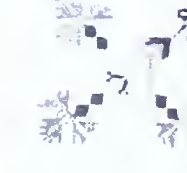
Plate 98. POT HOLDER; FM71.4.10

7" x 6 3/8"; natural cotton, blue and bleached linen, blue silk tape

This example is made of a plain-weave cotton fabric with yellow, red, purple, green and yellow-green wool yarn used to execute the floral design. The outer edges are bound with a blue silk tape, and a blue-and-white-plaid linen fabric was used on the back. It is signed and dated "RM 1792."



# Bibliography

- Burnham, H. B., and Burnham, D. K. *Keep Me Warm One Night: Early Handweaving in Eastern Canada*. Toronto, 1973.
- Gehret, Ellen J., and Keyser, Alan G. "Flax Processing in Pennsylvania from Seed to Fiber." *Pennsylvania Folklife*, XXII, No. 1 (Autumn, 1972), 10-34.
- Gilbert, Russell W. "Pennsylvania German Wills." *The Pennsylvania German Folklore Society*, XV (1950).
- Kuder, Solomon. "The Practical Family Dyer." *The Pennsylvania German Folklore Society*, XIII (1949), 177-215.
- Meyer-Heissig, Erich. *Weberei Nadelwerk Zeugdruck*. München, 1956.
- Reinert, Guy F. "Coverlets of the Pennsylvania Germans." *The Pennsylvania German Folklore Society*, XIII (1949), pp. 9-175.
- Schiffer, Margaret. *Historical Needlework of Pennsylvania*. New York, 1968.
- 
- 